

Illness and Healing

The Ministry Cycle in the Chora Monastery and the Literary Oeuvre of Theodore Metochites

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To Antony Cutler

The personal involvement of Theodore Metochites (1270–1332) in patronizing the reconstruction and decoration of the Chora monastery, his great artistic and spiritual foundation, is one of the most engaging issues for researchers in Byzantine art and architecture. The connection between the patron and the monastery's iconographic program has been explored extensively. Significant studies persuasively point to Metochites' influence on the depiction of certain representations, among them scenes from the Life of the Virgin and Enrollment for Taxation, which reflect his political office and his career as a statesman in general.¹ Rather than propose an interpretation of the cycles on Christ's ministry and miracles in light of Metochites' political aspirations and office,² however,

this article offers a reading based on the patron's innermost thoughts, beliefs, and contemplations as clearly expressed and passionately defended in his writings and as illustrated at Chora, his most beloved creation and

remain far from the management of state affairs, which had brought him only woe and grief, and to have devoted himself to studying books: "I am a prisoner of my own position, being forced willy-nilly to endure more than anyone else all kinds of hardship and to enjoy whatever might be considered a pleasure but I do not really know if there are <any pleasures> at all. In any case I wish I had never had such an experience" (I. Polemis, ed., *Theodori Metochitae carmina* [Turnhout, 2015], poem XI, vv. 202–206; translation from I. Polemis, *Theodoros Metochites: Poems* [Turnhout, 2017], 241). Metochites also writes, "Although everyone thinks that I am proud of this great, far-framed glory, I wish I had never obtained it; in other words, it would have been better for me not to be born at all (Job 3:1–3). . . . I believe that it would have been better for me not to have enjoyed such a supposedly happy life but to have lived free of all troubles. . . . Many times I have prayed to return to my previous way of life, to be alone and quiet and to devote myself to the study of literature" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XI, 140–44, 149–54; Polemis, *Poems*, 239). Thus Metochites characterizes the nature of authority as fiendish or devilish. See also J. M. Featherstone, "Theodore Metochites's Eleventh Poem," *BZ* 81 (1988): 253–64, esp. 262–3. Such declarations, which convey the tense political climate of the time, are not expressions of absolute honesty, because, as Metochites himself admits, his multifaceted intellectual activities were facilitated by the economic means that his high office secured for him. In one essay, Metochites admits that given his noble nature and the conduct of his life, his course toward the highest offices and the management of affairs of state was more feasible than a quiet life. See E. van der Velden, *Theodore Métochites: Une réévaluation* (Amsterdam, 1987), 179–80. See also J. M. Featherstone, "Metochites's Poems and the Chora," in *The Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, ed. H. A. Klein, R. G. Ousterhout, and B. Pitarakis (Istanbul, 2011), 219.

1 R. Ousterhout, "The Virgin of the Chora: An Image and Its Context," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. R. Ousterhout and L. Brubaker (Urbana-Champaign, 1995), 91–109; N. Teteriatnikov, "The Place of the Nun Melania (the Lady of the Mongols) in the Deesis Program of the Inner Narthex of Chora, Constantinople," *CabArch* 43 (1995): 163–80; R. S. Nelson, "Taxation with Representation: Visual Narrative and the Political Field of the Kariye Camii," *AH* 22.1 (1999): 56–82; idem, "Heavenly Allies at the Chora," *Gesta* 43.1 (2004): 31–40, both reprinted in idem, *Later Byzantine Painting: Art, Agency, and Appreciation* (Aldershot, 2007), I and III; R. G. Ousterhout, *Finding a Place in History: The Chora Monastery and Its Patrons* (Nicosia, 2017).

2 Metochites comments on his office in very negative terms. In his poem addressed to Theodore Xanthopoulos, written shortly after the renovation of the Chora, he repents the allure that the deceptive glory of authority held for him, declaring that he would have preferred to

spiritual refuge.³ The patron's literary oeuvre and his deep relationship to the monastery aid in interpreting the messages of the ministry cycle as well as its particularities, which, in relation to the established iconography of the period, provide insight into Metochites' thinking.⁴ The Chora's ministry cycle (1316–21) dates to a period for which several analogous examples of narrative cycles survive, the majority of them focusing on the public activities of Christ. Compared to Chora, however, the other preeminent monuments of the period whose paintings are linked directly to Constantinople and Thessaloniki—the monasteries of Staro Nagoričino (1316/17), Gračanica (1319/20), and the Chilandari (1320/21) as well as Panagia Hodegetria, in Mystras (narthex, after 1310–1320), all have half or less than half the number of scenes involving Christ healing the sick and use different iconography. The painters of these monuments organized the ministry cycles on a totally different basis, emphasizing the varied repertoire of public actions by Christ, striking a balance between his miracles and other aspects of his life, such as the parables.⁵ At Chora, however, the painter, working within the available space, concentrated on the thematic repertoire of Christ's healings. In this regard, and in the particulars of the scenes selected, Chora's iconographic program of the ministry cycle has almost no elements in common with the other monuments, including the Protaton, on Mount Athos, which has an

excellent example of a monastic program dating from circa 1300.⁶

On the basis of these introductory remarks, the intension here is to show the personal relationship between the extensive cycle of Christ's healings in the Chora narthexes and the life and philosophical conspectus of the Chora's patron. This theoretical framework raises the following questions: What is the significance of knowledge, and how does this fundamental notion influence the iconography of the ministry cycle? How are the consequences of man's spiritual death illustrated in Chora? How does Metochites interpret healing, and how is this interpretation linked to the healing scenes? How did the patron's philosophical thought affect the design of the spaces in the Chora complex and the organization of the iconographic program?

Devilish Actions, Knowledge, and the Triumph of the Divine World

The Chora's ministry cycle begins on the domical vault of the first bay of the outer narthex and ends in the south bay of the inner narthex (see fig. 1).⁷ The first representation, Jesus among the Doctors (fig. 1, no. 1), is unfortunately almost completely destroyed.⁸ The representation is complemented in ideological content by the compositions in the domical vault of the second bay. In the northern half of the vault is John the Forerunner Bearing Witness to Christ, and in the southern half

3 “O Chora. O my love. O most beloved part of my property, more pleasant than any other pleasant thing I accomplished . . . during my lifetime. . . . As a result I am able to enjoy the sweet light of the sun. . . . This can be clearly seen in the case of the Chora monastery, which I built as a refuge, so that I may be protected from the attacks of the enemy” (Polemios, *Carmina*, poem II, vv. 198–217, 576–80; Polemios, *Poems*, 99–100, 110). The Chora Monastery has been regarded as Metochite's self-extension; see P. Magdalino, “Theodore Metochites, the Chora and Constantinople,” in Klein, Ousterhout, and Pitarakis, *Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, 170–71.

4 For an overview of Metochites' personality and outlook, see D. Angelov, “Theodore Metochites: Statesman, Intellectual, Poet and Patron of the Arts,” in *Restoring Byzantium: The Kariye Camii in Istanbul and the Byzantine Institute Restoration*, ed. H. A. Klein and R. G. Ousterhout (New York, 2004), 15–22.

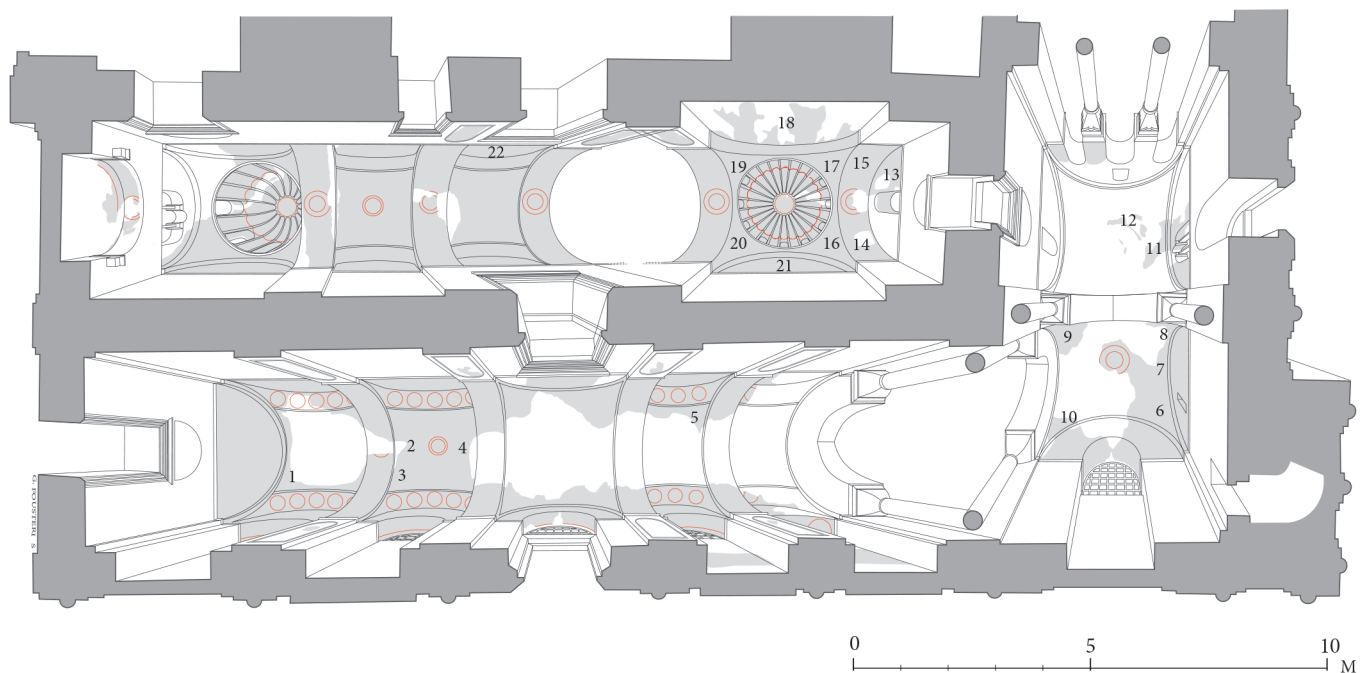
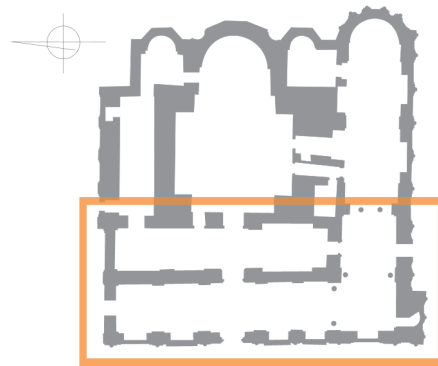
5 In the three Serbian monuments, the painters choose a limited number of healing scenes, whereas the ministry cycle is enriched with many other subjects, such as the teachings and sermons of Christ, and other episodes. For a summary presentation of the ministry cycle in the three monuments, see B. Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting: The Age of King Milutin* (Belgrade, 1999), 126–30, 321–22, 332–33, 345, 353.

6 In the entire Protaton, only three healings are depicted, and they are not in the same space: Healing of the Man Born Blind and Healing of the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, in the southwest chamber, and the Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand, in the southeast chamber. See N. Toutos and G. Foustieris, *Ευρετήριο της μνημειακής ζωγραφικής του Αγίου Όρους, 1005–1705 αιώνας* (Athens, 2010), 51, 53, 55–56. The iconographic program of the church, with the host of ascetic figures and saints, expresses a totally different conception from that in Chora. Differences in iconography have also been observed between Chora and the parekklesion of St. Euthymios in Thessaloniki. See M. A. Rossi, “The Miracle Cycle between Constantinople, Thessalonike and Mistra,” in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. N. S. M. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L. M. Bondioli (Leiden, 2016), 226–40, esp. 232–36.

7 For the totality of scenes of the ministry cycle surviving in the two narthexes, see P. A. Underwood, *The Kariye Djami*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966–67), 1:108–51; 2: pls. 211–81.

8 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:108–10; 2: pls. 211–14.

Fig. 1.
Chora, location of scenes from the
ministry and healings of Christ in
the outer and inner narthex. The
red circles represent decorative
and figurative medallions on
the domical vaults and on the
intrados. Drawing by G. Fousteris.



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| 1. Jesus among the Doctors | 12. Healing scene (?) |
| 2. John the Forerunner Bearing Witness to Christ | 13. Unidentified healing |
| 3. Heron Attacks a Snake | 14. Healing of the Leper |
| 4. Temptations of Christ | 15. Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand |
| 5. Healing of the Leper | 16. Healing of the Blind and Mute Man |
| 6. Healing of the Paralytic at Capernaum | 17. Healing of the Woman with the Issue of Blood |
| 7. Healing of the Dropsical Man | 18. Deesis-Christ Chalkites |
| 8. Healing of the Man Born Blind (?) | 19. Healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law |
| 9. Healing of the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda | 20. Healing of the Two Blind Men |
| 10. Healing of a Crippled Man (?) and Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well | 21. Healing of the Multitude |
| 11. Christ Calling Zacchaeus | 22. Patronal portrait of Theodore Metochites and the enthroned Christ |



Fig. 2. Chora, John the Forerunner Bearing Witness to Christ (*left*) and the Temptations of Christ (*right*), outer narthex, domical vault of the second bay. Photo by author.

one finds the Temptations of Christ (fig. 2).⁹ The beginning of Christ's ministry along with the unique combination of the compositions in the first two bays of the exonathex together represent the visual declaration of the concepts fundamental to Metochites' oeuvre: first, Chora's significance to its patron as a

spiritual foundation, and second, the importance of the attainment of spirituality and wisdom to man's life. Metochites attempted to counter the futility of earthly power by creating in Chora a cherished personal space, of which he is protective, maintaining its distance from the tragedy of human affairs and those incapable of appreciating it. In Metochites' second poem, dedicated to the Mother of God and the Chora monastery,

9 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:110–17; 2: pls. 216–27.

and in his fourth poem, to Nikephoros Gregoras,¹⁰ Metochites explains his view of the Chora as a “keep,” a repository of books and wisdom.¹¹ It is the space in which he produces his seminal work and, in that experience, feels the truest aspect of his life to the extent of calling his books—the ones he wrote and those that he acquired—*θησαυρίσματα ὀνήσιμα* (beneficial treasure).¹² At the same time, Chora is a refuge, the safe haven that protects him from hostile earthly powers and from demonic forces that bring unhappiness, grief, decay, and spiritual death:

Τοῦνεκα καὶ σὺ τὰδ' ἐκτόκια σοφίης ἀμεδαπῆς
δέχνοιο,
ἡύτε χώρ' εὐλίμενος, ἂν ἄρα πάντα ἐξείης
ἀπειρέσιον
γ' αἰῶν' ἐρύκουσα φθοῦρον ἀεικέα τῶνδ'
ἐπιγιγνόμενον
φθονόεντα, ὅσσα τε πόλλ' ἕτερα βιβλί' ἀγήοχα
τῇδε . . .
τοῦτο δ' ἄρ ἀμφὶ γε ποιήσιος ἱμερτὰ πολλόν.

Therefore, please take the products of my own wisdom under your protection, as a safe haven [*chora*] which protects them from all envious destruction forever. But you must be also ready to take care of all the other important books I have collected in this monastery; some of them are . . . books of poetry, i.e., beautiful works composed in various verses.¹³

10 Metochites' early poems, which make up the first group (nos. I–X), are dated to shortly after the restoration of Chora. See Polemis, *Poems*, 9.

11 The term *keep* is used by Featherstone, “Metochites's Poems,” 235–36, 238.

12 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, v. 1165; Polemis, *Poems*, 86. On the books of Metochites, see C. Förstel, “Metochites and His Books between the Chora and the Renaissance,” in Klein, Ousterhout, and Pitarakis, *Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, 257–66, esp. 257–58; Featherstone, “Metochites's Poems,” 228; A. Semoglou, “L'éloquence au service de l'archéologie: Les ‘enfants aimés’ de Theodore Métochite et sa bibliothèque dans le monastère de Chora,” in *Towards Rewriting? New Approaches to Byzantine Archaeology and Art: Proceedings of the Symposium on Byzantine Art and Architecture, Cracow, September 8–10, 2008*, ed. P. Ł. Grotowski and S. Skrzyniarz (Warsaw, 2010), 45–65.

13 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem IV, vv. 349–58; Polemis, *Poems*, 135.

With characteristic diligence, Metochites denotes the benefits of knowledge to man, expounding on them in his treatise *Ἠθικός ἢ Περὶ Παιδείας* (*Moral Treatise, or On Education*),¹⁴ dated ca. 1305, and in his poems. According to Metochites, continuous spiritual meditation cultivates man's intellect, leading him to the knowledge of the bounties that flow from studying the cosmos and, ultimately, to wisdom. Spirituality and secular wisdom bring serenity to the soul, endowing man with virtue and piety, which in combination with observation of the world (*theoria*) lead to knowledge of God. In Metochites' third poem, to Gregory, former archbishop of “All Bulgaria,” Metochites praises his dear friend (“O my dear head of Gregory”) for ridding himself of whatever impedes man from acquiring spiritual knowledge:

ὦ μακάριος σὺ γ' ὠνθρωπος τῶνδ'
ἀμφοτεράων . . .
καὶ τ' ἀμοιβὰδὸν ἄγχι πρόσθεν ἰὼν Θεοῖο
ἡδέ τ' ἀέζων κτήσιος αἰὲν ἱμερτῆς λούγων
παιδείας τὲ πάσης, τῆς θ' ἡμετέρας τῆς τ' ἐκτός,
ὅττι κεν αὐτὸν κἀνθεῦτεν ἔπειτ' ὀνίναίτ' ἂν τις,
ῥήιστ' εὐπετέως ἂν ὁδὸν θεωρίας ὄντως . . .
Τοῖς μέν, ἄρ αὐτὸς θεῖ' ἄνερ εἰκάθων σέ γ' αὐτὸν
πάρ τ' ἀρετήν, πάρ τ' αὐτὸν ἐπιπούθησιν σουφίης,
πρώτατον ἔργον τίθειαι λατρείαν Θεοῖο.
αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα δευτέρᾳ σοὶ φροντισμάτα λούγοι
καὶ τ' ἀμφ' ἄσχυλος αἰεὶ τοῖσι μέμνηλας πουνῶν
ἡματα πάντα τρίβων κάματον ἱμερόεντα.

O blessed man [Gregory] . . . you also increase your learning, acquiring more knowledge, which is desirable, both ecclesiastical and profane; one can derive profit also from secular knowledge in order to walk easily along the path of the contemplative life, not encountering obstacles. . . . You follow the example of those blessed and famous leaders of the faith. . . . Imitating both their virtue and their love of knowledge, O divine man . . . you direct

14 For the Greek, I use the latest edition: I. Polemis and E. Kaltsogianni, *Theodorus Metochites Orationes* (Berlin, 2019), *Oration* 10, *Ἠθικός ἢ Περὶ Παιδείας*, 347–429 (hereafter *Oration* 10). For the English translation, I cite S. Xenophontos, *On Morals or Concerning Education: Theodore Metochites* (Cambridge, MA, 2020), sometimes with minor revisions.

your attention to knowledge and you busily engage, every day, upon wisdom.¹⁵

The representation of Jesus among the Doctors in combination with John Bearing Witness to Christ and the spiritual life of the desert also reflects Metochites' ideas on the ideal in human life—the combination of virtue and knowledge—which he expresses in *Moral Treatise*:

Λόγω μέντοι πάνυ δὴ πρὸς τὴν ἀρετὴν, κοινὰ πλείστα καὶ μεγίστη συγγένεια· πρὸς τε τὴν τῶν ὄντων καὶ τοῦ βίου παντὸς σύνεσιν καὶ ἱστορίαν· καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἔτι τὴν εὐρεσιν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ θεωρίαν. . . . Παιδεία τοίνυν ἐν τούτῳ καὶ πρῶτον, καὶ τὰ τῆς σοφίας ἀγαθὰ, παραμένει τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον ἀπάντων, πιστῶς εἰς ἅπασαν τῷ κτησαμένῳ τὴν ζωὴν.

In fact, virtue has much in common with reason, and there is a quite substantial relationship in regard to their comprehension and knowledge of what exists and of life as a whole and, in addition, with regard to the actual discovery and contemplation of what is good. . . . First and foremost, education and the blessings of wisdom remain faithfully with the man who possesses them for his entire life more than any other human possession does.¹⁶

The scenes of John Bearing Witness to Christ and of the Temptations of Christ share the available space, which includes a discreet divide created by a fissure in the living rock, running east–west, at the two ends of the imagined vertical axis of the composition. The curious combination of the two scenes is to my knowledge the only known, extant example in Byzantine painting. The contrast between the divine bounty of knowledge and the devilish temptations that fight against it—which Theodore emphasizes in his literary oeuvre—is the dominant symbolic message of the decoration in the second bay. The scene with John highlights the personality and way of life of the Forerunner, who, in his alternative, ascetic way of life and his primal aim of gaining spiritual knowledge, represents the model of spirituality

and asceticism to Metochites.¹⁷ The Chora patron frequently praised John's ascetic lifestyle because it permitted man to perceive physical and spiritual wisdom:

ἰστάντ' ἀτροπον αἰὲν ἀέξον δὴν νοάμασιν
οὐρανίοισι μετὰ Θεὸν ψυχὰν ἀναείρουσιν.

[The quiet life brings peace to their hearts,] which become stable, and are thus in a position to speculate increasingly about heavenly things, removing their souls from the mud of material life and leading them to God.¹⁸

Without naming the Forerunner, Metochites describes him, mainly in *Ethikos*, through symbolic language but with enough traits to identify him. The similarity between the Forerunner and the Jewish Therapeutai (Healers), who lived as hermits in the desert, far from material comforts and pleasures, is obvious. Metochites speaks extensively about the hermits, who renounced the pressures of daily life and other dealings conducive to spiritual death to instead, in peace and tranquility, devote themselves to the study and observation of the physical world. Thus, in quietude and without temptations, the ideal scholars find true life in the spiritual world, which leads to the unique bounty of knowing the truth about God:

ὥς οὐδὲν τί ποτ' ἄλλο γένοιτ' ἂν, κατ' ἀνθρώπους ἡδιον, ὅταν τις ἑαυτοῦ γενόμενος ὄλος, καὶ τῆς ἐν ταῖς βίβλοις καὶ σοφίᾳ νεύσεως καὶ τρυφῆς καὶ συνουσίας καὶ συναγαγὼν ὥς οἶόν τέ ἐστι τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων εἰς ἀκλόνητον καὶ ἄσχετον καθάπαξ ἀπάντων καὶ ἀνέκδημον· καὶ ἀμέριστον ἐδρασμὸν καὶ μονὴν ἐλευθέραν τε καὶ ἀτύρβαστον, ἔπειθ' . . . ὥσπερ ἀφ' ὑψηλῆς τινος σκοπιᾶς ἀπόλυτον ἐπόπτην ἀφήση πρὸς ζύμπαντα τὸν κόσμον· καὶ τὴν ἄπλετον οὐσίαν τὸν νοῦν.

There could thus be nothing more pleasant among human beings than the moment when a person turns entirely to himself and to the

15 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem III, vv. 61, 65–70, 76–80; Polemis, *Poems*, 114–15.

16 *Oration* 10, 25.1–4, 26.1–3; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 55, 57.

17 The Jewish philosopher Philo, whose thought influenced Metochites, makes note of the ascetic way of life. In regard to the *Moral Treatise*, see I. D. Polemis, *Ηθικός ἢ Περὶ παιδείας* (Athens, 2002), 59–70.

18 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem III, vv. 126–27; Polemis, *Poems*, 117.

acceptance of, pleasure in, and discourse with books and wisdom, and focuses his mind, as far as possible, away from all other preoccupations onto a stable, utterly independent, unswerving, and undivided permanence that is also free and undisturbed. Afterward . . . as if from a high vantage point, [he] observes the entire world and its boundless essence.¹⁹

Metochites believes that the acquisition of knowledge reveals to man the bounties of the theoretical life and heals him.²⁰ His theory on the contemplative life and *theoria* are linked to Neoplatonic philosophical discussions and the theology of Gregory of Nazianzus.²¹ In chapter thirty-two of the *Moral Treatise*, a characteristic example of the influence of the *Therapeutai*,²² Theodore writes,

Ἄλλ' ἀνεπιστρόφῳ παντάπασι καὶ ἀτρεμιζούσῃ
διανοίᾳ τὲ καὶ κινήσει τοῖς τῆς σοφίας πτεροῖς
αἰθεροδρομεῖ καὶ δίεισι πάντων ἀεὶ κατὰ τὴν
παροιμίαν βάλλουσα ἐς μακαρίαν καὶ τρυφὴν οἶαν
ἀκύμονα καὶ μὴ σεσοβημένην, μηδὲ φορτικῶς ἄρα
κατέχουσιν, μηδ' ἐπικτωμένην, ἀλλ' ἐλευθέραν
ὄντως καὶ λογικῇ φύσει πρέπουσαν καὶ διουσαν
ἴλεων καὶ περιλαμβάνουσιν τὴν τοῦ νοῦ χώραν
καὶ τὴν λογικὴν ἅπασαν συμφύτιαν καὶ ἁρμονίαν
αὐτῷ τε καὶ ἀλύτῳ σοφίας πνεύματι.

The soul of such a man, by contrast, has completely firm and stable thoughts and movement, and flies in the sky above with the wings of wisdom; it always passes through everything until it reaches bliss, as the saying goes,

19 Oration 10, 54.5–14: Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 119, 121. At another point, Theodore says of the *Therapeutai* that their aim is to reach their goal in serenity, far from the fluidity of life: “They flee association and coexistence with the many in the cities. . . . They run from every plot that matter contrives, preferring instead isolation from all things as a companion for their desires and expectations, thus strengthening their initial way of life.” See Oration 10, 21.8–12: Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 49.

20 I. D. Polemis, “Ἡ ἡδονὴ τῆς θεωρίας των ὄντων στον Θεόδωρο Μετοχίτη: Ἐπιδράσεις του Φίλωνος του Ιουδαίου και του Συνεσίου Κυρηναίου στον Ἡθικό,” *Ελληνικά* 49 (1999): 245–75, esp. 246–49.

21 D. S. Kalleres, “Demons and Divine Illumination: A Consideration of Eight Prayers by Gregory of Nazianzus,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 157–88, esp. 157–61.

22 Polemis, *Ἡθικός*, 43, 47–48, 62–63, 68–69.

and a calm enjoyment, which is never agitated, does not hold sway over it in a vulgar manner, rendering it its own possession, but instead it is truly free and suitable for a rational nature, transcends gracefully, and embraces the region of the mind, the entire rational congruence and harmony, with the help of the immaterial, painless spirit of wisdom.²³

Such idyllic views of the ascetic life are reflected in the scene in which John informs the Jews of the Word and the wisdom of God in the person of Christ (fig. 3). It is interesting that the Jews are not depicted as was typical, wearing simple garments, but as Constantinopolitan aristocrats, like, for example, the figure wearing a red hat in the group to John's right (fig. 2). This is because the recipients of Metochites' messages on the value of acquiring knowledge were members of his own milieu. Thus in the mosaics at the scholarly patron's foundation, the elite class of Constantinople are represented through their fine clothing.²⁴ Metochites in his writings addresses the aristocracy, who although able to spend more time on examining the inner workings of the spirit, alas succumb to their love of material pleasures, which leads to unhappiness:

οὐδ' ἴσασι τοσοῦτον· ὅπῃ δὴ γῆς κατορώρκεται·
καὶ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἄσκιον αἰθρίαν, καὶ τὸ τῶν
λογισμῶν καὶ τῆς διανοίας διαφανές, ἀμαυρώ-
σαντες καὶ καταζοφώσαντες, ἐπετείχισαν πρὸς
ἅπασαν | ἐπιστήμης αὐγὴν καὶ θεωρίας· ἀσυλλο-
γίστως ἑαυτῶν καὶ τῶν ὄντων, ἀσυλλογίστως τῶν
ὀρωμένων ἔχοντες· ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ τὰ ἀνδρείκελα
τῶν τυπωμάτων· . . . καὶ καθάπερ ἐν πελάγει τῷ
βίῳ, τὸν ἅπανθ' ἑαυτῶν αἰῶνα δυστυχοῦντες· καὶ
δίχα κυβερνήτου προθέμενοι ναυαγεῖν.

They have obscured the unshaded tranquillity of their soul, the transparency of their judiciousness and intellect, and sunk into darkness. Then they have erected a wall against any gleam of knowledge and contemplation, so that they cannot comprehend anything about themselves and the things that actually exist, and cannot

23 Oration 10, 55.6–14: Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 123.

24 For Metochites' interest in aristocratic dress, see Nelson, “Heavenly Allies,” 34–36.



Fig. 3. Chora, John the Forerunner Bearing Witness to Christ. Photo by author.

comprehend what they see either, just like unskillfully modelled human statues. . . . And, as if their life were a sea of troubles, they are unhappy for their whole life span, and without a helmsman are destined to be shipwrecked.²⁵

The representation of John the Forerunner at the start of the ministry cycle is of nodal importance—the key figure linking the iconography of the first two bays. The Forerunner symbolizes the struggle for spiritual wisdom, which begins with Jesus among the Doctors, and the ascetic model of life that leads to Christ prevailing over Satan in the Temptations scene. Pointing to Christ, the Forerunner urges the Jews to follow him. John may also be an allegory of Metochites himself, who constantly urges his fellow men to pursue a quest for the spiritual wisdom that can heal humans. One frequently encounters this spiritual exhortation in his

writings, particularly in the *Moral Treatise*. The following are two typical passages:

ἀνδρὶ δὲ ἀστείῳ καὶ περὶ τοὺς λόγους ἐσπουδαὲ
κότι μάλιστα· ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς βιωτικῆς ἀνωμαλίας
ταραττομένῳ τὲ καὶ φλεγμαίνοντι· μεγίστην
ἐμποιεῖ τοῖς λογισμοῖς λειότητα καὶ γαλήνην.

Especially for a cultivated and highly educated man, I think, who is agitated and disturbed by the vicissitudes of life, communion with wisdom and its blooming meadows brings enormous relaxation and calm to his mind.²⁶

ἀλλ' ὡς ἀντὶ μεγίστου καὶ καλλίστου τοῦδε καὶ
πρώτου, τῶν ὅσα κατ' ἀνθρώπους εἰσὶ χρήματος,
ἅπαντα αἰρεῖσθαι δέον ἐπικτωμένους, καὶ σπουδῇ
πάσῃ χρῆσθαι.

25 Oration 10, 7.15–20, 32–34; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 15, 17.

26 Oration 10, 28.26–29; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 63.

Rather, what I am saying is that it is necessary for us to choose to acquire this wisdom as the greatest, most beautiful, and principal object of everything that exists for mankind.²⁷

Following the same line of thinking helps explain the particular detail of John pointing to Christ in Chora in relation to the iconography found elsewhere during the Palaiologan era (1261–1453). Other compositions of the Forerunner in Palaiologan painting, including at the Protaton (ca. 1300) and at the Bogorodica Ljeviška (ca. 1310), in Prizren, emphasize the Baptism, in contrast to the Chora's representation, about which the thinking underlying the iconography differed.

Questions in research have revolved around the absence of the Baptism in the exonarthex of the Constantinopolitan monastery in contrast to the episode's fundamental importance to the ministry cycle at other monuments.²⁸ That said, the omission is intentional, with the aim of elevating John's role as a teacher in the wilderness, preaching the principles exemplified by the Therapeutai. Thus, his role as Baptizer was downplayed. In doing so, the Chora program relegates the Baptism to a separate space and a different iconographic context—the Dodecaorton in the naos.²⁹ Furthermore, in the Protaton, in the scene with John Christ is depicted among the Jews, whereas in Ljeviška, Christ stands out, away from the group (as in Chora), and the painter uses a different iconographic model.³⁰ The various gestures, movements, and expressions of the figures, who are traversing a vast and rich natural environment, combine to create a theatrical scene

similar to examples often encountered in monuments of the Palaiologan period.³¹

Another peculiarity differentiating Chora's program from other baptismal iconography is found in the northeastern pendentive of the second vault, where a heron is seen attacking a snake in a narrow stream of water gushing forth in the rugged landscape of the wilderness (fig. 4).³² This motif of ancient symbolic significance and a rich iconographic heritage symbolizes Good, in the form of various birds, killing the traditional symbol of evil, the serpent.³³ The model of the scene in Chora does not follow the iconographic tradition of eagles with vanquished snakes in their beaks.³⁴ To the contrary, the artist chose an aquatic bird like those frequently depicted attacking snakes in mosaic pavements of late antique basilicas.³⁵ The same

27 *Oration* 10, 51.7–9; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 111.

28 Although the absence of the Baptism has been characterized as “conspicuous” by P. A. Underwood (“Programs and Iconography of Ministry Cycle,” in *The Kariye Djami*, vol. 4, *Studies in the Art of the Kariye Djami and Its Intellectual Background*, ed. P. A. Underwood [Princeton, 1975], 252, 272), no justification for this has yet been given. See also A. Katsioti, *Οι σκηνές της ζωής και ο εικονογραφικός κύκλος του Αγίου Ιωάννη Προδρόμου στη βυζαντινή τέχνη* (Athens, 1998), 105, n. 418.

29 Underwood, “Ministry Cycle,” 272.

30 For the Baptism cycle in the Protaton and Bogorodica Ljeviška see Underwood, “Ministry Cycle,” 272–77, pls. 8, 10a–b. See also D. Panić and G. Babić, *Bogorodica Ljeviška* (Belgrade, 1975), drawing 31; E. Tsigaridas, *Μανουήλ Πανσέληνος: Εκ του ιερού ναού του Πρωτάτου* (Thessaloniki, 2003), figs. 6 and 9.

31 Similar theatricality, with analogous movements and poses by the protagonists, is observed in the scene of John asking Christ about Peter's life in Staro Nagoričino. See N. Zarras, “The Passion Cycle in Staro Nagoričino,” *JÖB* 60 (2010): 204–5.

32 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:113; 2: pls. 216–17, 219.

33 For the symbolism of Good and Evil and the bird-serpent motif, see M. Panayotidi, “Βυζαντινά κιονόκρανα με ανάγλυφα ζώα,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 6 (1972): 109, n. 110, with previous bibliography. E. Dautermann-Maguire and H. Maguire, *Other Icons: Art and Power in Byzantine Secular Culture* (Princeton, NJ, 2006), 60–82, figs. 60, 66–67, 78 with bibliography. See also V. Nersessian, *Treasures from the Ark: 1700 Years of Armenian Christian Art* (London, 2001), 144, no. 58.

34 One of the best-known examples is, of course, the scene of the eagle with snake in the sixth-century mosaics of the imperial palace of Constantinople. See J. Trilling, “The Soul of the Empire: Style and Meaning in the Mosaic Pavement of the Byzantine Imperial Palace in Constantinople,” *DOP* 43 (1989): 27–72, at fig. 40; J. Jobst, B. Erdal, and C. Gurtner, *İstanbul: Büyük saray mozayigi / Istanbul: Das grosse byzantinische Palastmosaik / Istanbul: The Great Palace Mosaic* (Istanbul, 1997), 10 (plate), fig. 26. The motif is quite common in sculpture, as in the marble relief from Kavala, dated to the fifth–sixth century, and the column capitals in the Old Metropolis at Edessa as well as works in the Veroia Museum and in the Istanbul Archaeological Museums. See H. Maguire, “An Early Christian Marble Relief at Kavala,” *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 16 (1991/92): 283–95, esp. 286–88, figs. 1 and 9; reprinted in idem, *Rhetoric, Nature and Magic in Byzantine Art* (Aldershot, 1998), V. See also Panayotidi, “Βυζαντινά κιονόκρανα,” 83, 114; Dautermann-Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 62–63, 71–72, figs. 53–54, 65–67.

35 Take for instance the mosaics from the fifth-century Ilissos basilica (today in the Christian and Byzantine Museum of Athens) and the sixth-century St. Paraskevi basilica, in Kozani; the pavements in the church of the fifth-century Multiplication, at Tabgha, and at Sepphoris; and the bronze amulet in the Kelsey Museum. See P. Boubouli, ed., *Ο Κόσμος του Βυζαντινού Μουσείου* (Athens, 2004),



Fig. 4. Chora, Heron Attacks a Snake. Photo by C. Wales; Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Photograph and Fieldwork Archive, BF.S.1991.0340.

iconographic motif is also found in thirteenth-century pottery.³⁶ Why, however, did the patron of Chora and the painter deviate from established iconography and opt for a more secular motif not encountered in the Baptism cycle?

In ecclesiastical literature generally, an avian image, in particular of an eagle fighting a serpent, symbolizes the struggle of Christ against the Devil and

sin.³⁷ The decoration of the second bay, an autonomous program with abundant, closely interconnected iconographic elements, leads, however, to a new interpretation of the entire composition: in the narrow stream of water, an allusion to the River Jordan,³⁸ the symbol of Good in the form of a waterfowl, which should be interpreted as an allegory of Christ of the Baptism, destroys the symbol of the Devil. The killing of the snake, and therefore the destroying of the Devil in the water, in direct iconographic relation to the Forerunner in the wilderness, obliquely declares Good prevailing through Baptism. Also implied is the soteriological property of the Jordan's water versus the chthonic powers of the Old World and evil,³⁹ a relationship linked superbly with the composition of the Temptations.

90, 97, fig. 76; E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou and M. Michaelidis, *Η βασιλική της Αγίας Παρασκευής στην Κοζάνη: Παρατηρήσεις σε ένα μνημείο του β' μισού του δού αι.* (Thessaloniki, 2002), 17, fig. 35; P. Assimakopoulou-Atzaka, *Σύνταγμα των παλαιοχριστιανικών ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων της Ελλάδος*, vol. 3.2, *Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Μακεδονίας και της Θράκης (εκτός Θεσσαλονίκης)* (Thessaloniki, 2017), 301–6, esp. 303, cat. no. 1.42, pl. 199; A. M. Madden, *Corpus of Byzantine Church Mosaic Pavements from Israel and the Palestinian Territories*, *Colloquia Antiqua* 13 (Leuven, 2014), 146–47, fig. 25, with earlier bibliography; R. Hachlili, *Ancient Mosaic Pavements: Themes, Issues and Trends* (Leiden, 2009), 106; Dautermann-Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 66, fig. 60.

36 H. Maguire, “Magic in Byzantine Pottery: The Other Within,” in *Identity and the Other in Byzantium: Papers from the Fourth International Sevgi Gönül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, ed. K. Durak and I. Jevtić (Istanbul, 2019), 206–7.

37 See Maguire, “Marble Relief,” 290, 292; Dautermann-Maguire and Maguire, *Other Icons*, 60–62. The correlation of the snake with Evil is a fundamental Christian concept found time and again in texts throughout the Byzantine period.

38 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:113–14.

39 Maguire, “Magic in Byzantine Pottery,” 207, fig. 2, interprets the scene of the bird and the snake as symbolizing the suppression of the daemonic forces through the ceremony of Baptism.

The Chora patron, starting from a philosophical foundation, specifically Plato, argues that notwithstanding the power of evil, good ultimately triumphs in society.⁴⁰ Indeed, in referring to envy and sycophancy as the most detestable forms of evil, Metochites invokes the poisonous snake, which attacks man with malice:

καίτοι γε κομψότερον εἰρημένος, μάλιστα
ἀληθείας ἡφθαι. ἡμεῖς δὲ νῦν ὅμως τοσοῦτο κατὰ
τῶν ἀστείων ἐνίοτε καὶ ἐνίων τὸ τῶν βδελύρων
τούτων ἀνδρῶν καὶ φθορέων· καὶ λήρων, κράτος,
ὁρῶμεν, ὥστε τὰ μέγιστα, κατὰ τοὺς λυσσώδεις
δάκνοντας κύνας ἰσχύειν· ἢ μᾶλλον κατὰ τῶν
ζώων τὰ ἰοβόλα κρύφα.

However, we sometimes now observe that the power of some devilish and destructive creatures over some dignified men is so great that they are absolute masters of the situation, like the rabid dogs that bite, or, rather, like the venomous snakes that covertly and maliciously attack and destroy their victims.⁴¹

The roots of these iconic conceptions of Theodore are to be found in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus.⁴² Thus, the intentional and conspicuous absence of the Baptism from

the design of the program of the second bay would seem to be justified by the symbolic language of Metochites, who emphasizes a more philosophical approach to the eternal struggle between good and evil.⁴³ This universal clash, a favorite theme in Metochites' writing, is also illustrated in the Temptations of Christ (fig. 5).⁴⁴ Metochites begins his first poem with a prolix prayer to God in which he describes in epic terms the struggle between good and evil, for which he blames the devilish forces whose aim is to destroy God's material and spiritual gifts to mankind.⁴⁵ The satanic actions targeting the human spirit lead to darkness, sin, and illness:

ἡδόμενος κέαρ ἐκπάγλως ἀν' ἀπλετα δῶρα,
τὰ κτίσεως ἀπάσης κατέχευε χάρις ἄλκιμος
νωλεμὲς ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῖο, νόος τ' εὐεργής.
... Ἄλλ' ἤτοι τάδε μ' ἀποέλεν κακομηχάνοιο
βασκανίη Βελίαρ, ὃς ἄνωθ' ὑβρίσας πίπτει,
φάεος ἐξ αἰγλήντος σκοῦτος ἐνιδὺς βαθύ.
... Τὸν μέν, ἄρ' αὐτομέδων θέτ' ὀχθήσας
σκοτόεντα,
ἐξοῦ κάκ' ἡλλάξατο καὶ οἱ αἴτιος αὐτὸς
ἐκ τοῦδ' ἡμέας ἄρ κάκ' ἐόργειν ἄτρυτα πουνεῖ
βάλλων ἀμφαδίην κρύφα τε στονόεσσι λυγροῖς.

God is the source of all good things, giving to everything the gift of its existence and proper conduct, in a way that is fitting to it, so that everyone may contemplate it with his mind admiringly. . . . However, all these were taken from us because of the envy of mischievous Satan. . . . He became our implacable enemy for all time, prompting sinful thoughts in our minds. . . . Therefore, pain, groaning tears and every kind of misery, unutterable wailing, painful childbirth, illness that brings us near death,

40 "In the case of what is good and bad, however, although evil is always much more prominent in life than goodness, still the latter always survives and, as one would expect, it has never until now failed in its battle against the rivaling multitude of evil. This is of course a significant testimony, I believe, to the power of goodness" (*Oration* 10, 14.3–5; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 33).

41 *Oration* 10, 14.8–13; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 33.

42 The image of wild or evil dogs is referenced in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus. See C. Simelidis, *Selected Poems of Gregory of Nazianzus* I.2.17; II.1.10, 19, 32: *A Critical Edition with Introduction and Commentary* (Göttingen, 2009), 182, 184. For the admiration and influence of Gregory of Nazianzus in Metochites' thinking, see I. Ševčenko, "The Logos on Gregory of Nazianzus by Theodore Metochites," in *Geschichte und Kultur der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. W. Seibt (Vienna, 1996), 221–33; idem, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in Underwood, *Kariye Djami* 4 (see above, note 28), 38, n. 149; Simelidis, *Selected Poems*, 67. Metochites' sixth poem is dedicated to "The Three Hierarchs." In his third poem, these hierarchs were characterized as pillars of faith and wisdom. Also see Polemis, *Poems*, 114–15. On the relationship between the post-baptismal life with the contemplative life and the struggle against the forces of darkness, see Kalleres, "Demons and Divine Illumination," 157–88.

43 This fundamental concept in the ancient world, through the ancient Greek motif of the attacking heron, points to Metochites' "critical eye" with regard to the aesthetics of the classical past. See M. J. Featherstone, "Theodore Metochites's *Seimeioseis Gnomikai*: Personal Encyclopedism," in *Encyclopedic Trends in Byzantium?*, ed. P. van Deun and C. Macé (Leuven, 2011), 333–44, esp. 338–39.

44 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:114–17; 2: pls. 115–16; idem, "Ministry Cycle," 272, 277–80.

45 I. Polemis, "Η φωνή της εξουσίας: Η δομή της αφήγησης στα ποιήματα του Θεόδωρου Μετοχίτη," *Parekbolai* 7 (2017): 115–33, esp. 120–21.



Fig. 5. Chora, Temptations of Christ. Photo by author.

and every disaster imaginable flow upon us without pause.⁴⁶

When man neglects his spiritual nature, the agency of demonic forces destroys it.⁴⁷ One of the worst effects of a darkening intellect is the expression of hatred and envy, which are considered illnesses of the soul and the body. These most dangerous weapons of evil lurk in life to destroy relationships among men, leading to their degeneration and decline. This painful situation is expressed by Metochites not only as a sociological observation of nature, but also as a personal, lived

experience, noting that men envy and defame him.⁴⁸ Envy is a spiritual sickness,⁴⁹ according to Metochites, and a symptom of decadent social behavior that troubles his soul and causes him fear.⁵⁰ As man lacks the means to ward off devilish actions, his only salvation is through God's power, which Metochites never ceases to invoke:

48 "Envy, be gone from me: I shone among my beloved fellow students, being the most brilliant of them all. . . . It made my mind forget for a moment how many envious people are lying in wait, ready to do harm both to my own affairs and to my literary studies" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XI, vv. 165–67, 176–78; Polemis, *Poems*, 240). Metochites expresses similar thoughts on envy in the *Moral Treatise*. See *Oration* 10, 66.1–6, 87.1–4; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 153, 207.

49 Gregory of Nazianzus also espoused the notion of envy as a disease. See Simelidis, *Selected Poems*, 161–62.

50 Envy is a symptom among not only the illiterate, but the literate as well. On envy in Metochites' works, see M. Hinterberger, "Studien zu Theodoros Metochites: Gedicht I—Des Meeres und des Lebens Wellen—Die Angst vor dem Neid—Die autobiographischen Texte—Sprach," *JÖB* 51 (2001): 294–302; idem, *Phthonos: Missgunst, Neid und Eifersucht in der byzantinischen Literatur* (Wiesbaden, 2013), 168, 226, 322–25.

46 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, vv. 85–87, 172–74, 187–90; Polemis, *Poems*, 51, 54–55.

47 In Metochites' third poem, to Gregory, archbishop of Bulgaria, he wrote, "Sometimes this material mud dampens our soul's enthusiasm, casting it into the depths of Tartarus. In these swamps our soul is stained, being stuck in the mud, and it becomes formless and ugly, losing any possibility to breathe freely" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem III, vv. 130–34; Polemis, *Poems*, 117).

Ἄλλ' ἄρ' ἔγνω ἔμπευς πανάγαθε λίτομ' ἐσαυθίς,
δέσποτ' ἄναξ (τί γὰρ ἂν δρώην, ποῖ δ' αὖ ποτ'
ἴδωμαι;)

λίτομ' ἄναξ ἐλέους αἰεῖναι δὴ πηγαία,
ἄνσχεο σείο χόλοιο, τὸν ἔνδικα πολλὸν ἄμμες
ἀμφ' ἄρ' ἡμέας ὀτρυνόμεσθ' ἀνίατα κακίης,
ἔλκεα πάσχοντες ψυχῶν φθοροποιά, δίδου τε
τῶνδ' ἀμοιβαδὸν λευγαλέων, ἕτερ' αὖ ἥδιστα
πράγεια λιαρὰ σὴν διὰ χεῖρα πολυδότιν ἐσθλῶν.

But I still pray to you, O my good Lord. What else can I do? To whom shall I turn now? O eternal fountain of mercy, O my Lord, I beg you, stop being angry against us; we brought your just anger upon ourselves, and we are now full of incurable wounds caused by our crimes that destroy our souls; grant us happiness after these disasters; change the situation for the better, your hand being indeed so generous.⁵¹

The Temptations of Christ illustrates the triumph of Christ and the spiritual world over the demonic forces and symbolizes man's salvation. Divine power and divine wisdom are victorious over the forces of darkness,⁵² which in the patron's literary oeuvre is interpreted as healing from illness. Characteristically, Theodore notes in his fifth poem that like St. Athanasios with his spiritual deeds, Christ, like a good doctor, conquers the destructive forces that cause disease, restoring the body and the spirit to full health:

ἐσθλὸς ἱητὴρ τά γ' ἐπέοικε διακριδὸν εἰν νῶ,
βαλλόμενος, χ' ὅθεν ἀρχὰς ἔκαστ' ἀργαλέα λάβε,
... καὶ πᾶσαν εὐ γ' ἀπαλαλκόμεν ἀργαλέαν
κακότητα,
καί τ' εὐνέ' ἀντιθεῖν ἕξιν ἐρατεινήν,
ἀντίαν ἢ πάρος ἦεν, εὐδιόοσαν, ἀγανήν,
ιάσατ' ἔνθεν ἔπειτ' ἄφαρ, ἀνὰ δ' ἅπασ' εὐρατο
κλειὸς ἀρίτιμον ἢ μάλα βρουτοῖς πουλύδοξον.

A good doctor treats a body, worn out by frightful diseases, which have followed one another for many years. . . . <He then decides> by what means these bad things can be kept in check and cured, driving away those illnesses

and restoring the healthy condition of the body which is so desirable. By doing this he cures the body and wins great, precious glory among men.⁵³

In the *Moral Treatise*, spiritual power—a reflection of divine wisdom—is presented as a good physician who not only tutors man but also cures him:

τὸ δέ, ἐστὶν οὐκ ἄλλως, ἢ λόγου παιδαγωγού,
μᾶλλον δὲ βασιλέως δεῖσθαι· καθιστῶντος, οὐκ ὀλλύντος . . . καὶ ἱατρὸς γὰρ ὧς χρῆσθαι παρὸν ὄλως
κατ' ἄλλην τινὰ οἰκονομίαν καὶ τέχνην, οὐ τέμνειν,
καὶ τὸ δοκοῦν δυσχερὲς ὅπως οὖν καθιστάν . . . ἀλλ'
ἡγεμόνα τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἱατρὸν ἐπεστήσατο. καὶ γὰρ
οὔτ' ἀχρεῖον τὸ γεγονὸς δὴ τοῦτο.

And there is no other way to do this than by demanding education as our teacher, or rather as our emperor who does not destroy our affairs but arranges them. . . . For the physician who can employ some alternative method of medical treatment rather than incision. . . . For in our case nature has rendered our mind a ruler and a physician, not a terminator of nature's possessions.⁵⁴

The scene of the Temptations of Christ is an outstanding example of the visual narration of a Gospel dialogue in Palaiologan art and unique in its design. Depicting four episodes, it illustrates Christ's dialogue with Satan, who vainly attempts to break the spiritual power and divinity of the Lord. The artist's penchant for theatricality is obvious in the figures' attitudes and gestures, along with conveying emotion, as well as in the way in which he links epigraphic material with representation. The inscriptions, an integral part of the narrative ensemble, are exceptionally interesting because of their polymorphism, their placement within the composition, and the diverse narrative methods with which the Gospel story is told.

53 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem V, vv. 196–97, 200–4; Polemis, *Poems*, 142–43. A clear parallel is drawn between the healing action of Athanasios's doctrinal works for the church and the healing-salvation that issues from God. See Polemis, *Poems*, 146–47.

54 *Oration* 10, 52.20–22, 23–25, 27–29; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 115, 117. See also Polemis, *Ἠθικός*, 20.

51 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XIV, vv. 293–300; Polemis, *Poems*, 273.

52 Polemis, “Η φωνή της εξουσίας,” 122.

At the center of the domical vault, the inscriptions are harmoniously positioned in the iconographic context and are balanced in their distribution within the architectural space, encircling the decorative medallion at the center of the vault.⁵⁵ In this way, the mosaicist gives the inscriptions autonomy and meaning, as on the one hand, they occupy their own space in the decoration, and on the other, they comment upon the episodes depicted. The beholder, following the episodes clockwise, finds them accompanied by arched inscriptions that ring the fixed point of the medallion, providing essential identification for the episodes and dialogues between the figures. The mosaicist also skillfully combines the symbolic message of the representations, the inscriptions, and the natural setting of the narrative composition. The inscriptions of Christ's words appear high up on the gold ground, while Satan's words are set low, down upon the grayish rocks. The contrast of the mosaic's bright gold and dark ground alludes to the opposition of the divine light and the demonic darkness of Satan's words, which try to dim the spirit of Christ and of Adam, according to Gregory of Nazianzus.⁵⁶ The inscriptions narrate the story using two different literary methods: dialogues between Christ and Satan, in the first, second, and fourth episodes, and narration of the story, in the third episode.⁵⁷ These biblical texts, together with the gestures of Christ and Satan, constitute a unique entity, representing the spirituality and eloquence of the mosaics and the patron.⁵⁸

Thus, in the second domical vault of the outer narthex, the artist of the ministry cycle distinguished the established motifs of the baptismal cycle to create a unique composition with innovative iconographic solutions. Furthermore, the Temptations—like Heron Attacks a Snake and John the Forerunner Bearing Witness to Christ—transmit, at the beginning of the ministry cycle, a fundamental ideological message

about the triumph of the spiritual world. The salvation of man, achieved through acquiring true knowledge and resisting evil on a symbolic level, functions as an introduction to the healing cycle that follows.

Illness, Healing, and Salvation

The symbolism of the healing Christ, who through the power of divine wisdom resisted temptation and vanquished Satan, is fundamental to Metochites' thinking. To him, the triumphant Christ is the guarantor of man's healing and salvation.⁵⁹ Metochites views society as seriously ill, and in his writings, describes the spiritual cause of this malaise, which is generally reflective of social decadence rather than the prevailing sociopolitical situation. Metochites emphatically expresses his innermost belief about illness in society in his fifth poem:

Ὡς δε τι σῶμα τόπερ δαμάσαντο νόσοι στυγηραὶ
συνεχές, πολυτειρέες εἶτα πόλλ' ἐξείης
καὶ τ' ἄρ' ἔπ' ἔσχατα πολλάκις ἡγαγον βίοτιο.

[A good doctor] treats a body, worn out by frightful diseases, which have followed one another for many years.⁶⁰

In his eleventh poem, to Theodore Xanthopoulos, Metochites writes of the human experience:

ἡμέας ὤμεθα ἡύτ' ἐν ὑποστάθμῃ κόσμου
βίον ἄρα, λελαχότας, ἔσχατα δὲ βιότιο,

59 The motif of healing, in the sense of intellectual cultivation and exercise, is a Platonic convention that Aristotle later adopted (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a19, 1105b17). The *locus classicus* is the dialogue of *Charmides*, in which *καλοὶ λόγοι*—that is, philosophy—is the medicine that instills in man's soul *σωφροσύνη* (prudence), the epistomological concept of a special knowledge that serves as a prerequisite site for a healthy mind and body: *Θεραπεύεσθαι δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν ἔφη* [a Thracian doctor, follower of the god Zalmoxis], *ὦ μακάριε, ἐπωδαῖς τισιν, τὰς δ' ἐπωδὰς ταύτας τοὺς λόγους εἶναι τοὺς καλοὺς. ἐκ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων λόγων ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς σωφροσύνην ἐγγίγνεσθαι, ἥς ἐγγενεστὴς μένης καὶ παρούσης ῥάδιον εἶναι τὴν ὑγίειαν καὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ σώματι πορίζειν* (Plato, *Charmides* 137a3–b1). Gregory of Nazianzus speaks about the wisdom of God as a medicine that heals sickness of the soul: *ἡ τὰς ἀκοὰς ἀποφράζαντες ἀσπίδος κωφῆς καὶ τὰ ὠτα βουούσης τρόπον, μὴ ἀκοῦσαι φωνῆς ἐπαδόντων φιλονεικοῦμεν, μηδὲ φαρμακευμῆναι σοφίας φαρμάκοις οἷς ἀρρωστία ψυχῆς θεραπεύεται*. See Gregory Nazianzenus, *Apologetica Or.* 2 (PG 17:429).

60 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem V, vv. 193–95; Polemis, *Poems*, 142.

55 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 2: pls. 216–17; R. Ousterhout, *The Art of the Kariye Camii* (London, 2002), 59 (figure).

56 Kalleres, "Demons and Divine Illumination," esp. 174–77, and on the anti-demonic formulations in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus, 176–86.

57 See N. Zarras, "Remarks on Donor and Other Narrative Inscriptions of the Chora Monastery," in *Materials for the Study of Late Antique and Medieval Greek and Latin Inscriptions in Istanbul: A Revised and Expanded Booklet*, ed. I. Toth and A. Rhoby (Oxford, 2020), 175–78, 183–94, at 175–76.

58 For the inscriptions, see Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:114–15.

λευγαλέα πολυῶδυν' ὕλης ὑστάτια πικρά,
τίδ' ἄρ' ἔπειτ' ἐνθεῦτεν ἐρρυγάνοντες ἄγ' ἔνδον
δάμνησι κραδίην πολυτεϊρέεσσι μερίμναις,
ράονα δῆτα τιθεύμεθα ψυχὰν ἐπαχθισμάτων
ἄδινάων τ' ὀδυνάων κουφίζοντες ὀπηοῦν.

Lamenting our own situations, we thought that we were most unlucky, since we were destined to live in the worst period of human history, being the dregs of human life and enduring dire hardships. Afterwards, having confessed to one another the sorrows that were ravaging our hearts because of our anxieties, we were somewhat relieved, lightening the burdens of our souls, relieving them of our terrible pains.⁶¹

Characteristic too are his references to sickness and its various forms in the *Moral Treatise*:

τὸν αὐτὸν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν τρόπον· καθάπερ καὶ οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὀφθαλμοὺς ἢ χεῖρας, ἢ πόδας παρακεκομμένοι τὲ καὶ λελωβημένοι, ἦν ἄρα τίς μεμνητο καὶ προφέρει τὴν νόσον, βαρέως φέρουσι.

In this behavior they (individuals) seem to me like many people who are crippled and handicapped with regard to their eyes, hands, or feet, and who, as soon as someone recalls and refers explicitly to their disability.⁶²

This tragedy of life, due to the effect of forces hostile to man, leads to illness. Metochites believed that mental illness affected the body as well as the mind and vice versa. His views on the relationship between sin and sickness reflected the conventional wisdom of

the time, which largely ascribed physical and mental disabilities to the power of the Devil.⁶³ The thinking of Metochites (and his later disciple Nikephoros Gregoras) about the fall of the human spirit, which leads to sin and suffering and is interwoven with the decay of the body, and about the image of Christ as healer expresses a wider concept also encountered in the works of other spiritual personalities of the period. The difference between Metochites and other authors who addressed the relationship between sin and illness, such as Theoleptos of Philadelphia,⁶⁴ is that for Metochites, the theme is pivotal in most of his writings, its primacy evident in the multiple references to it. Furthermore, he connects illness to salvation, which he finds through Chora.⁶⁵ This affirms the personal link between the patron and his foundation, making Metochites' approach to the issue unique.

The decoration of the third bay—with scenes from the Wedding at Cana and the Multiplication of the Loaves—has been linked by scholars to the iconographic program of the Bema.⁶⁶ That the surviving scenes and the fragments in the fourth and the sixth bay focus on healing shows the ministry cycle to be the dominant theme of the entire exonarthex. The identification

63 See for example S. Efthymiadis, "The Disabled in the Byzantine Empire," in *Disability in Antiquity*, ed. C. Laes (London, 2017), 388–402, esp. 395–97.

64 In a sermon of Theoleptos of Philadelphia on Christ's healings, illness is related to the decadence of the soul and human virtues. Similar views are also aired by the patriarch Athanasios I. See T. Gouma-Peterson, "Christ as Ministrant and the Priest as Ministrant of Christ in a Palaeologan Program of 1303," *DOP* 32 (1978): 212–16; D. Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol: The Early Christian Image of the Haemorrhissa and the Mosaics in the Narthex of the Kariye Camii," in *The Woman with the Blood Flow (Mark 5:24–34): Narrative, Iconic, and Anthropological Spaces*, ed. B. Baret (Louvain, 2014), 160.

65 The notion of salvation is also stressed by the inscriptions: H ΧΩΡΑ ΤΟΥ ΑΧΩΠΗΤΟΥ (The Realm of the Uncontainable) and H ΧΩΡΑ ΤΩΝ ΖΩΝΤΩΝ (The Realm of the Living) for the Virgin Mary and Christ, respectively. Both epithets served the purpose of Metochites to show Chora as a place of salvation. See T. Tanoulas, "Χώρα: Christian Aspects of a Platonic Concept," *Δελτ. Χριστ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 34 (2013): 405–16, esp. 410–12.

66 The scenes of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes and the Miracle at Cana have long been linked spatially and symbolically with the Eucharistic subjects of the Bema. See Underwood, *Programs and Iconography*, 264–67, 271–72. See also Ousterhout, "The Virgin of the Chora," 98–99; idem, *Kariye Camii*, 58; Nelson, "Heavenly Allies," 33; idem, "Taxation with Representation," 67.

61 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XI, vv. 28–34; Polemis, *Poems*, 236.

62 *Oration* 10, 76.4–8; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 177. Elsewhere he says, "Although they (men) suffer, they say that they are equipped for anything and are largely healthy; they claim that they are in a constant state of tranquility . . . and a storm inside the minds of these men throws their souls into tumult. They purportedly have the power to confront all the difficulties of public life, but as soon as they happen to deal with such affairs, they are exposed" (*Oration* 10, 80.30–35; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 191). In the same work, Metochites makes several more references to the illnesses in society and the associated problems of human life. See *Oration* 10, 82.17–22, 99.6–14; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 195, 239.

of the fragment in the seventh bay with the representation of Zacchaeus (fig. 1, no. 11) leaves no doubt that the ministry cycle, emphasizing the miracles, was also the main unifying theme in the last bay.⁶⁷ The Healings cycle continues into the inner narthex and concludes in the south domed bay.⁶⁸ In all, representations of fifteen to sixteen Healings survive, and it is certain that more healing scenes would have been presented in the destroyed parts of the domical vaults of the bays in the exonarthex. This makes the program at Chora one of the most extensive healing cycles, its scenes outnumbering those at Staro Nagoričino and Gračanica and more or less equaling those in the monastery of Dečani (after 1330–1346/47), the latter where the healings, as in the two other churches, are depicted together with scenes of teaching and the parables in different spaces of the enormous church.⁶⁹ The ministry cycle, especially the healings, in the narthex of the Panagia Hodegetria in Mystras appear to have been influenced by the iconographic tradition of Constantinople.⁷⁰ This relationship between Constantinople and the Hodegetria is due first and foremost to Pachomios, the patron and hegumen of

the latter, whose agency with the capital and personal ambitions guided his activities at Mystras.⁷¹

To satisfy the wishes of Chora's patron, the artist of the narrative cycle relied on the Gospel pericopes describing the healings.⁷² In doing so, he selected familiar subjects and employed tried-and-tested iconographic formulas, including the healings like these of the Pentekostarion period,⁷³ but he also crafted scenes otherwise unknown in Palaiologan painting. It is apparent to those who study Metochites that he does not explicitly reference every miracle in his work, only the most important ones in the Byzantine tradition. As has been aptly remarked, one would not expect a man such as Metochites, a highly intelligent being, to make pronouncements regarding the iconographic program or to write about the painting in a descriptive manner.⁷⁴ Among the principal particularities of the Chora's ministry cycle are the emphasis on Christ's miracles, specifically focusing on the healings, and Christ's triumph over evil in combination with the lack of any iconographic intimation of the Lord's suffering, entirely omitting the popular Passion cycle from the program. Metochites' obvious preference for the healing becomes even more interesting when one learns, from his second poem, that the refectory of the Chora was decorated, most probably with frescoes with representations of Christ's miracles interspersed with flowers.⁷⁵

Several of the illnesses afflicting figures in the ministry cycle and scenes of healing are ones Metochites

67 One surviving fragment to the right of Zacchaeus' tree unfortunately cannot be identified (fig. 1, no. 12). See Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:137–42, fig. C, pls. 258–59.

68 For the scenes of healing in both narthexes, see Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:124–51; 2: pls. 246–281; Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, 58–69. For more healing scenes, see S. Pasi, "Il ciclo del Ministero del Cristo nei mosaici della Kariye Djami: Considerazioni su alcune scene," in *L'arte di Bisanzio e l'Italia al tempo dei Paleologi*, ed. A. Iacobini and M. della Valle (Rome, 1999), 183–94; eadem, "La scena della guarigione di diverse malattie nella pittura monumentale tardobizantina," *CorsiRav* 42 (1995): 685–98; Teteriatnikov, "Nun Melania," 168–75.

69 Underwood, "Ministry Cycle," 261–62, n. 78; B. Todić, *Staro Nagoričino* (Belgrade, 1993), 73, 75, 108, figs. 40–41, 60; idem, *Serbian Medieval Painting*, 126–30, 322, 332; M. Marković, "The Cycle of Christ's Public Ministry," in *Mural Painting of Monastery of Dečani: Materials and Studies*, ed. V. J. Djurić (Belgrade, 1995), 133–47; B. Todić and M. Čanak-Medić, *Manastir Dečani* (Belgrade, 2005), 379–84.

70 On the ministry cycle in Panagia Hodegetria (Aphentiko), see M. Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς: Η μεσαιωνική πολιτεία και το κάστρο* (Athens, 2005), 55–56; R. Etzeoglou, "The Cult of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege at Mistra," in *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. M. Vassilaki (Aldershot, 2005), 239–45; eadem, *Ο ναός της Οδηγήτριας του Βροντοχίου στον Μυστρά: Οι τοιχογραφίες του νάρθηκα και η λειτουργική χρήση του χώρου* (Athens, 2013), 79–155, with bibliography; Rossi, "Miracle Cycle," 236–40.

71 Proof of the relationship with Constantinople is the interest shown by Emperor Andronikos II, which was expressed by his bestowing the title of protosynkellos on the hegumen Pachomios and by the chrysobulls granting privileges to the Hodegetria Monastery. See Etzeoglou, *Ναός της Οδηγήτριας*, 29–38; T. Papamastorakis, "Reflections of Constantinople: The Iconographic Program of the South Portico of the Hodegetria Church, Mystras," in *Viewing the Morea: Land and People in the Late Medieval Peloponnese*, ed. S. E. J. Gerstel (Washington, DC, 2013), 371–95, esp. 373–74.

72 Underwood, "Ministry Cycle," 262–64.

73 See, for example, the healings in the Parekklesion of the Virgin at the monastery of St. John the Theologian in Patmos. D. Mouriki, "Οι τοιχογραφίες του παρεκκλησίου της μονής του Ιωάννου του Θεολόγου στην Πάτμο: Το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα, η αρχική αφιέρωση του παρεκκλησίου και ο χορηγός," *Δελτ. Χρυσ. Αρχ. Έτ.* 14 (1987–88): 205–66, esp. 228–32.

74 Featherstone, "Metochites's Poems," 220.

75 See below, pp. 115, 117.

references in his writings.⁷⁶ Preserved in the domical vault of the Chora's fourth bay is a small part of the Healing of the Leper (fig. 1, no. 5); the other half of the vault has been completely destroyed.⁷⁷ The artist, utilizing narrative details from the stories in the Synoptic Gospel, mostly from Matthew (8:1–4), focuses on leprosy, a theme repeated on the west side of the southernmost arch of the inner narthex.⁷⁸ Leprosy, an abhorrent illness, was the most stigmatized ailment in Christian Byzantium.⁷⁹ People reacted so negatively to the outward appearance of the afflicted and to the contagiousness of the disease so much that lepers had to live apart from society, for the sake of the “healthy.”⁸⁰ For these reasons, leprosy became a frequent subject in patristic literature. The church fathers, including Gregory of Nyssa, urged their readers to feel compassion and to care for those suffering from it.⁸¹ Metochites, well known for his high esteem of Cappadocian theology, follows a similar line of thinking. In the *Moral Treatise*, he employs the image of the leper as the most socially stigmatized of the sick to emphasize the problems of human existence and to develop the idea of salvation through the intervention of the merciful Christ:

καὶ μὴν ἔθ' ὁ παντάπασιν ἀναιδής τις εἶναι δοκῶν·
καὶ ἀνάρμοστος· καὶ λελωβημένος ἀμέλει καὶ
στιγματίας.

On the other hand, a person who appears utterly sinful and patently dishonorable is like a leper.⁸²

76 Some of those mentioned by Metochites are also encountered in the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus. See Simelidis, *Selected Poems*, 213–14.

77 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:124; 2: pls. 246–47.

78 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:148, 2: pls. 274–75; Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, 61, fig. 60.

79 For leprosy in the medieval world, see G. Makris, “Zur Epilepsie in Byzanz,” *BZ* 88 (1995): 363–404; D. Stathokostopoulos, “Death in the Countryside: Some Effects of Famine and Epidemics,” *AntTard* 20 (2012): 105–14; T. S. Miller and J. W. Nesbitt, *Walking Corpses: Leprosy in Byzantium and the Medieval West* (London, 2014).

80 Efthymiadis, “The Disabled,” 394.

81 Gregory of Nyssa, *De pauperibus amandis*, ed. A. van Heck (Leiden, 1964), 2.114.

82 *Oration* 10, 63.13–15. The translation is my own and follows Polemis's modern Greek version of Metochites' text in Polemis, *Ἠθικός*, 169.

Metochites also alludes to leprosy when he speaks of the corruption of human relations being a result of sin. This social anomaly appears as a discernible corporeal illness:

Αἰ αἰ· τί τούτου γένοιτ' ἂν, ἥδιον, ὄντως ἀνδρὶ τῶν
ἀπάντων ἄλλο, ὃ μὴ παντάπασιν κατεκιβδηλεύθη
καὶ κατενόσησεν ἡ ψυχὴ· μὴ δὲ συμπλακείσα τοῖς
τοῦ κόσμου τοῦδε λήροις· καὶ μολύσμασι, κηλίδας
τινάς, ἔστιν ὑφ' ὧν δευσοποιούς καὶ μύση κακῶς
προσανεμάξατο.

Alas! What else could really be more pleasant than this for a man whose soul has been completely adulterated or become seriously ill, nor has been wickedly besmirched by some indelible stains and defilement through embracing the chattel and pollution of this world.⁸³

The image of lesions as symbolic expressions of misfortune and as a result of a horrible life in general is manifest in Metochites' thinking. He even uses it to comment on his own existence, thus explaining the meaning of the cycle to him, as Chora's patron:

δῆτ' ἀνιηροῖς πάρ γ' ἴφ' ἀκεύμενος ἵζευ λούγοις,
δροῦσον ἰάλλουσι κραδίηνδ' ἀγανόφρον' ἄρ'
ἔνδον,
καὶ τε παρήγορος ἦσθα ταχὺς διὰ μήδεα σουφά,
ἥπια φάρμακ' ἐπὶ πάντεσσι λευγαλέοισι.

Whenever I had some misfortunes, you sat near me, trying to cure my grief with your words, which refreshed my heart, calming it down . . . offering me effective remedies for my painful wounds.⁸⁴

ἥτ' ἀνὴρ νοσερὰ παρ' ἔσχατα μάλ' ὀλίγον τι
πνεύων, αὐτόθεν ἔλεπτ' ἐνὶ νεκάδεσσιν ἔμμεν,
τάχα μάλ' ὥκα διαδρᾶν' οὐποτ' ἐὼν θάνατόν τε,
ἥδ' ἐτελευτήν ῥα βιότοιο παλίνστροφον οὐπως.

I resemble a man who is fatally ill and breathes his last: he expects that he will be among the

83 *Oration* 10, 55.1–5; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 121, 123.

84 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XI, vv. 50–53; Polemis, *Poems*, 237.

dead soon, since there is no possibility for anyone to escape death and to come back to life.⁸⁵

In Metochites' writings, the image of the leper points visually and metaphorically to one of the most serious problems of Byzantine society—the treatment and healing of leprosy patients in segregated spaces, set apart from society.⁸⁶ The Chora mosaics express this approach to human illness, which is uppermost in Metochites' texts. Those afflicted with leprosy are depicted wearing a loincloth only and their bodies covered with the characteristic large lesions of the disease; the ulcers individualize their bodies, differentiating the self from the others. The standard iconography of leprosy, as in St. Catherine's in Thessaloniki, in Čučer, in Chilandari, and a little later in Dečani, depicts the Healing of the Ten Lepers with their bodies crowded together and vanishing behind the first row of the afflicted.⁸⁷ In contrast, the painter of both images of healing in Chora chose to depict a single leper. The artist's decision not to follow the dominant narrative type differentiates Chora from other monuments and in this way emphasizes the symbolic message of healing, which is represented by one leper (Matthew 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45). This message permeates throughout Metochites' writings.

At Chora, the tension and drama of the Healing of the Leper focuses on Christ and the leper as the two protagonists, with the latter communicating compellingly,

85 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XIV, vv. 62–65; Polemis, *Poems*, 267.

86 One such space was presumably the leprosarium supported by the Pantokratoros monastery. See R. G. Ousterhout, "Water and Healing in Constantinople," in *Life Is Short, Art Long: The Art of Healing in Byzantium*, ed. B. Pitarakis (Istanbul, 2019), 77, n. 27, with bibliography. These spaces are often referenced in hagiological texts. See Efthymiadis, "The Disabled," 392–97. Ten lepers are also depicted in the Parekklesion of the monastery of St. John in Patmos. See Mouriki, "Οι τοιχογραφίες," 230, 264.

87 E. N. Tsigaridas, "Les fresques de l'église Saint-Catherine de Thessalonique," in *Sur le pas de Vojislav J. Djurić: Reçu à la séance de la classe des sciences historiques le 31 Mars 2010* (Belgrade, 2011), 157–65; A. Semoglou, "Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος της Αγίας Αικατερίνης Θεσσαλονίκης μέσα από το αρχείο του Στυλιανού Πελεκανίδη: Ζητήματα χρονολόγησης και ταύτιση του ναού," in *Γ' Επιστημονικό Συμπόσιο "Βυζαντινή Μακεδονία." Θεολογία—Ιστορία—Δίκαιο—Φιλολογία—Τέχνη* (Θεσσαλονίκη 14–16 Μαΐου 2010) (Thessaloniki, 2019), 712, fig. 7; Todić, *Serbian Medieval Painting*, 345, 353; M. Marković, *Saint Nikitas near Skopje: A Foundation of King Milutin* (Belgrade, 2015), 174, 181; idem, "Public Ministry," 49; Todić and Čanak-Medić, *Dečani*, 382.

as conveyed by his lively gaze and gesticulation. Close examination of the leper reveals his body to be somewhat "contradictory" compared to the more standardized gestures of the Ten Lepers in the aforementioned monuments. While sores manifest affliction, if not suffering, the leper's body nonetheless exudes physical vigor, devoid of the deterioration that leprosy causes, thus denoting the leper's hope and the deep expectation of healing.⁸⁸ These same qualities are uppermost in Metochites' invocations to Christ for healing. The patron's notion of a *philanthropos* Christ, who heals society, permeates not only in his first poems, but his last ones as well.⁸⁹

When referring to the various categories of the sick, Metochites emphasizes the physically disabled,⁹⁰ which according to the Gospel tradition includes the various categories of the crippled. In the exonarthex, the domical vault of the sixth bay is dedicated to the disabled (fig. 1, nos. 6–10), with representations of the two best-known Gospel narratives on paralytics—at the Pool of Bethesda (fig. 6), on the northeastern pendentive, and at Capernaum, on the southwestern part of the vault.⁹¹ The healing on the southeastern pendentive has been identified with the Man Born Blind (fig. 1, no. 8), while it is difficult to identify another male figure's affliction because only his feet and the lower part of his legs are preserved, above the head of the Samaritan Woman at the Well on the northwestern pendentive of the sixth bay (fig. 7; fig. 1, no. 10).⁹² His spindly legs and baggy trousers suggest a crippled man, like the one depicted in the Healing of the Multitude (examined below), the paralytic in St. Demetrios in Mystras (phase, 1272–1282),⁹³ or a demoniac (according to Underwood).⁹⁴

88 G. Peers, "The Iconography of Healing and Damaged Bodies in Kariye Cami: Methodological Reflections," in *Iconography beyond the Crossroads: Image, Meaning, and Method in Medieval Art*, ed. P. Patton (University Park, PA, forthcoming).

89 See above, note 51. Also, in the *Moral Treatise* Metochites notes, "Just as the winds blow on the mountains bestowing bliss, so too the breezes sent by the merciful divinity relieve their labors and the flames of their temptations, and the rising of certain stars produces an ineffable pleasure" (*Oration* 10, 21.13–16; Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 49).

90 See above, note 62.

91 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:126–29, 132–33; 2: pls. 250, 251a–b, 253–55.

92 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:135; 2: pls. 250, 257a.

93 Chatzidakis, *Μυστράς*, 36, fig. 24.

94 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:134–35; 2: pls. 250, 257a.



Fig. 6.
Chora, Healing of the
Paralytic at the Pool of
Bethesda. Photo by author.



Fig. 7.
Chora, Healing of a Crippled
Man (?) and the Samaritan
Woman at the Well. Photo
by author.

Metochites and the Healings in the Inner Narthex: Prooimion to the Parekklesion

The healing cycle continues from the seventh bay of the exonarthex into the south domed bay of the inner narthex, where there are eight scenes depicting almost all the diseases of the Gospel pericopes (fig. 1, nos. 13–21).⁹⁵ The successive depictions of figures harrowed and deformed by illness make the cycle a rare artistic study on the aesthetics of the disabled body, which here should be interpreted in the context of the physical realism and symbolism of the mosaics. In the presentation of these broken and blighted people, whose tragic lives Metochites describes, it is imperative to note how he converts desperation into the hope of salvation through the miracle of healing and how he approaches Christ of the Miracles. For Metochites, Christ always responds with magnanimity and offers redemption in the face of exigent circumstances and human pain; healing flows from his philanthropy and compassion.⁹⁶ Christ of the Miracles is the Christ of Philanthropy, and the Chora, as the church of the Virgin and of Christ, is a place of healing and salvation:

συναύλια δ' ἔμπης
 κάρτ' ἐρίηρα τάδ' ἅμα συνοικέοντες Χριστῷ,
 συντελέες τ' ἐράνου πάσης ἀρετῆς πολυτίμου
 παμμέδοντι Θεῷ, τοῦ γ' ἐξ ἅρα πᾶσα δοτίνη
 ἀμφὶ θνητοὺς βρουτοὺς εἰσι τελεί' ἄνωθεν,
 πᾶν τ' ἀγαθὸν δόμα χ' ὅς κεν ἅπαντα πράττεθ'
 ἡμῶν,
 ἅττα δυναίμεθ' ἀγαθὰ οἱ φερέμεν πρόφρουνες,
 κούδεν ἀπ' ἄρ' ὠθεῖτ' αὐτοῦ βραχὺ ἢ μείζον,
 πάντα δέ τ' αὐτὸς ἐπιρρειάων τὰ σφέτερ' αὐτοῦ
 ἀνδεδέχατ' ἐράων, προουτίνων δεξιτερὴν οἶο,
 ὥς κεν ἐρασιχρήματος ἀνὴρ μάλα κ' ἔραται.

95 A large part of the last scene on the tympanum of the south wall of the inner narthex has been destroyed and remains unidentified. See Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:142–51; 2: pls. 260–281.

96 Christ's role as the merciful healer expresses the more general concept of the benevolent God, who with the depth of his wisdom permits suffering but in the end displays his magnanimity and grants the healing of the faithful disabled. This idea is clear in Theoktistos the Stoudites' vita of Patriarch Athanasios I, which is roughly contemporary with Metochites' restorations at Chora. See A.-M. Talbot, *Faith Healing in Late Byzantium: The Posthumous Miracles of the Patriarch Athanasios I of Constantinople by Theoktistos the Stoudite* (Brookline, MA, 1983), 79, 111.

Inhabiting these lovely halls together with Christ, you share in the quest for every precious virtue with God the All-Counsellor from whom every perfect gift comes unto mortals from on high, every good thing. He requires of us all the good things that we can do, offered with open heart; He rejects nought, neither little nor greater, but Himself bestowing everything He receives his own successively, extending His right hand with desire, even as an acquisitive man greatly desires to obtain all that he formerly lacked.⁹⁷

The miracles of healing the blind are popular subjects in the cycle and prominent themes in Theodore's writings. The scenes of the Healing of the Two Blind Men (fig. 8) and Healing of a Blind and Mute Man (fig. 9) are depicted in the southwest and the northwest pendentive, respectively, of the south domed bay of the inner narthex.⁹⁸ Blind men appear also in the representation of the Healing of the Multitude (discussed below). The Chora patron, consistent with the theological approaches of his time, considers the image of the healed blind man, that is, the restoration of sight, as symbolic of the rebirth of the soul and the spirit.⁹⁹ For Metochites it symbolizes the opening of the eyes to spiritual light and the introduction to the *vita contemplativa*. In the *Moral Treatise* and in his first poem, Metochites wrote that this particular healing gives man, through the physical ability of sight, the possibility of awareness of the spiritual bounties bestowed by God in the form of knowledge, which few men are able to appreciate. He also uses the example of blindness to emphasize the spiritual wealth of the Chora monastery, which only those free of disease are able to enjoy. In his first poem, he states:

97 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem II, 441–51: Featherstone, "Metochites's Poems," 234.

98 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:142–45; 2: pls. 260–63. See also Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, 61, fig. 55.

99 For Theoleptos of Philadelphia's interpretation of the Healing of the Man Born Blind, see Gouma-Peterson, "Christ as Ministrant," 215; I. Grigoropoulos, *Θεολήπτου Φιλαδελφείας του Ομολογητού* (1255–1322): *Βίος και έργα*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1996), 2:67–76. See also, Mouriki, "Οι τοιχογραφίες," 230–31. See also Teteriatnikov, "Nun Melania," 171, 173–74.

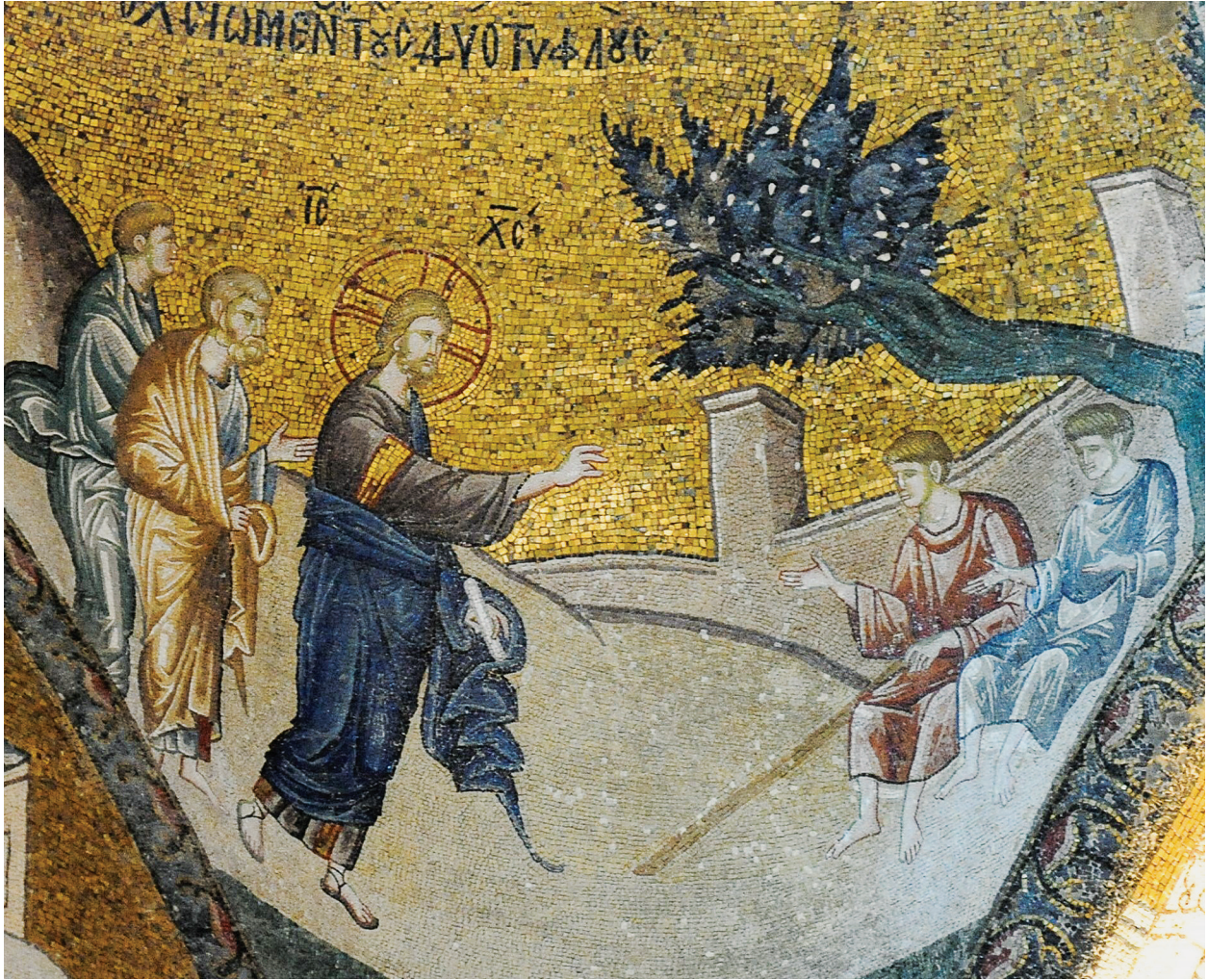


Fig. 8. Chora, Healing of the Two Blind Men. Photo by author.

καί με πόθος γ' ὅδε κάρτ' ἐξ ἄρα κἀει κέαρ εἴσω
 κᾶββαλον ὥχ' ὅσα σαθρά κε τῆς μουνῆς λείποντο
 ἐξ ἄρ' ἀνὰ γῆν ρίψας βάθρων, αἶψα δὲ καινὴν
 στήσ' ἀτὰρ οἶαν ὁράαν ἔνεσθ' ὥς κεν βούλοιτο
 ὅσσε τέ οἱ δύναται, κοῦ φθοῦνος ἐέργει λυγρός.

I rebuilt the monastery without delay, as may be seen now. Everyone can enjoy the spectacle, as he wishes, or as his eyes permit, provided that mournful envy, which prevents people from seeing any pleasant thing, blinding them willy-nilly, does not deter him.¹⁰⁰

100 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, 980–84; Polemis, *Poems*, 82. It is also interesting that like the monastery, the merciful Christ,

In the *Moral Treatise*, taking the image of the Man Born Blind as an exemplum, Metochites comments on some men's inability to respond to illness by seeking healing:

οὕτω δὴ παντάπασι τῆς νόσου κάτοχοι· καὶ περι-
 γεγένηται σφῶν· ὥστ' οὐδ' ἴσασιν, ἡντιναοῦν
 ἀπαλλαγὴν, οὐδὲ ζητοῦσιν· οὐδὲ πιστεύουσιν,
 ἄλλο τί ποτ' ἀγαθὸν μήποτ' εἶναι· μὴ δ' ἂν τις

according to Chora's patron, offers the Holy Spirit that heals man from blindness, as mentioned in the sixth poem: "Through them we also plead with Christ to have mercy upon us, turning a blind eye on the numerous trespasses that keep prisoner each other of us" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem VI, 128–30; Polemis, *Poems*, 154).



Fig. 9. Chora, Healing of the Blind and Mute Man. Photo by author.

πάση σπουδῇ προδιδάσκη. καὶ τυφλῷ δὴ γεννησθέντι, τὲ καὶ βιοῦντι, τίς ἂν ἀμέλει ξυναίσθησις, φωτὸς γένοιτο· ἢ τίς ἄρα ποτὲ μάθησις παρ' ὅτους οὖν, ὅσης ἡμεῖς ἀπολαύομεν ἐπ' αὐτοῦ τε καὶ δι' αὐτὸ τρυφῆς;

They are so oppressed and overtaken by the grip of their illness that they do not know or seek any means of escape, nor do they believe that any other good will ever come to them no matter how earnestly someone tries to advise them beforehand. Can the person who is born blind and remains blind all his life experience the sense of light, or can someone explain to

him how much joy we derive from it and on account of it?¹⁰¹

Thus through the image of the Blind Man, Metochites expresses the overriding notion that Chora symbolizes the spiritual and corporeal restoration of man and his return to his authentic state; for Metochites, the healing of the body is linked directly with cultivation of the spirit.¹⁰² Consequently the healings of the blind

101 *Oration 10*, 99.10–16: Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 239, 241.

102 “Alas! Nature has linked our miserable, wicked flesh with our souls. . . . Our mind—tries to—escape from the body, which is a tomb of the soul. . . . Thus our mind is willing to liberate itself

in Chora illustrate his belief that the monastery itself is the place for healing the body and soul and the sole place of divine philanthropy, where, through healing, the harmony of the cosmos is revealed to man:

καὶ τ' ἀγαθῶν νυ παρασκευή, φιλανθρώπουμα
πάκγοινόν γ' ἐκκείμενον, ἐς τ' ἄρα πάντα
βρουτούς . . .
καὶ σύν τ' αὖ
φάρμακον ἀμόθεν, ὅττι πόθ' ὑμῖν ἀκηδίας ἐσθλὸν
ἀμφὶ πόνησι διαμπερές . . .
πρός δ' ἔτι καὶ μάλ' ὄνησιν ἐπαυρίσκεσθαι κείθεν,
ἐξ' ἅρ' ἔπειτ' αὖθις πονέειν ἃ προύθεσις ἐντί;
Ἦτοι τά, μὲν ἐγὼν πάρ' τόνδε νόον ταμίευσα
τῇ μονᾷ θησαυρίσματ' ὀνήσιμα βιβλίῳ ἐσθλά.

It (the monastery) is a fountain of all good things, a common benefaction to all men. . . I <have provided you (Chora) with> good medicine against weariness that is caused by those unceasing pains that you suffer. . . Is there a better medicine for those men against weariness than to study books of wise men and cheer their unsteady minds? That was the purpose of my collecting these excellent books here as a beneficial treasure.¹⁰³

Two of the rarest scenes of healing in Byzantine art are found at the Chora: the Healing of the Man with the Withered Hand (fig. 10) and the Healing of the Multitude. The first healing is depicted on the eastern part of the southernmost arch (fig. 1, no. 15), before the passageway to the parekklesion. In *Moral Treatise*, Metochites mentions infirmities of the hands when referring to the various afflictions of body parts.¹⁰⁴ The depiction of the man with the rather long, outstretched withered arm and the rendering of his deformed fingers is without comparison in Byzantine painting.¹⁰⁵ Exaggeration in the anatomical rendering

even by killing the body" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, 1198–1204; Polemis, *Poems*, 88–89).

103 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, 1122–23, 1148–50, 1166–69; Polemis, *Poems*, 86–87.

104 See above, p. 99.

105 In contrast to Chora, in the Protaton the painter did not exaggerate the deformed anatomy of the hand. See *Πρωτάτο II: Η συντήρηση των τοιχογραφιών*, A', ed. I. Kanonidis (Polygyros, 2015), 212–13, no. 165, fig. 157.

of diseased limbs is characteristic not only of this representation but also of others in Chora. About two decades later, another depiction of this illness appeared, in Dečani.¹⁰⁶

The Healing of the Multitude is on the western wall of the south bay (fig. 1, no. 21). The image of the group healing is inscribed O XC ΙΩΜΕΝΟC ΤΑ ΠΟΙΚΙΛΑ ΠΑΘΗ ΤΩΝ ΝΟΧΜΑΤΩΝ (Christ healing the multitude of sins of diseases) (fig. 11).¹⁰⁷ The inscription is important to the symbolism of Metochites' thinking and the perception of Christ as healer, as the phrase πάθη τῶν νοσημάτων derives from medical treatises.¹⁰⁸ The scene depicts three seated cripples, two blind men, a man with a hernia, and two women standing and offering their babies to Christ. Behind the women are a man and another woman leaning on sticks and a blind woman. The only known representation of a similar group healing predates the Chora and is in the west lunette of the south aisle in the Metropolis church of Mystras.¹⁰⁹ The Metropolis scene, however, has different iconographic models, as is apparent in a group of people possessed by the devil, a cohort considerably removed from the sick described by Metochites and depicted in Chora.¹¹⁰ The other example is in Dečani, but again, the Chora representation is not associated with it in iconography.¹¹¹ Another iconographic type of the Healing of the Multitude, in the early fifteenth-century church of Prophitis Elias in Thessaloniki, is totally different from Chora's, a fact that enhances the uniqueness of

106 Todić and Čanak-Medić, *Dečani*, 381.

107 Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:149–51; 2: pls. 277–81; idem, "The Ministry Cycle," 297–98; Ousterhout, *The Art*, 62, fig. 62. See more recently, M. A. Rossi, "Reconsidering the Early Palaiologan Period: Anti-Latin Propaganda, Miracle Accounts, and Monumental Art," in *Late Byzantium Reconsidered*, ed. A. Mattiello and M. A. Rossi (London, 2019), 71–84, esp. 72–76.

108 The phrase is encountered in the work of Stephanos the Athenian (seventh century): *Υπόμνημα εἰς τοὺς Τηποκράτους ἀφορισμούς* (4.34.11). The medical meaning is used by Nikephoros Kallistou Xanthopoulos (thirteenth–fourteenth century), PG 146:693B: Ὁ μὲν οὖν Κόπρης εἰλήφει χάριν δαιμόνων τε κρατεῖν, καὶ ποικίλων νοσημάτων ἰᾶσθαι τὰ πάθη.

109 G. Millet, *Monuments byzantins de Mistra* (Paris, 1910), pl. 76.1 (drawing); S. Dufrenne, *Les programmes iconographiques des églises byzantines de Mistra* (Paris, 1970), 7, fig. 10, diagram V.56, pl. 7.

110 Underwood, "Ministry Cycles," 300–301.

111 Underwood, "Ministry Cycles," 299–300, fig. 35; Todić and Čanak-Medić, *Dečani*, 380.

Fig. 10.
Chora, Healing of the
Man with the Withered
Hand. Photo after
Ousterhout, *Kariye
Camii*, 66, fig. 59.



the Constantinopolitan representation and the different models for the painter in Thessaloniki.¹¹²

In contrast to typical fourteenth-century iconography, for that of the Chora the artist selected a small number of afflicted people, although he had quite a large space available to him. The absence of the hernia sufferer

in Dečani and the emphasis on the blind in Chora are two distinct differences in the iconography of these two monuments. Moreover, in Dečani, the painter's tendency toward simplification and generalization of the subject is apparent in the host of sick people crammed at the back of the scene, without any indication of their particular illness. In Chora, however, the artist distinguishes among the sick and clearly depicts their individual illnesses; he also provides them facial expressions. The first of the two mothers markedly bends her body, indicating haste and decisive movement in trying to get closer to the Lord and present him with her sick child, which is crippled because of a problem with its legs; the infant almost hovers in its mother's arms. In contrast to the impetuous motion of the mother is the almost supine pose of blind man, who senses Christ's presence and tries to stand up, supporting his weak body on a

112 In *Prophitis Elias*, the enthroned Christ, who seems to be teaching rather than performing miracles, as well as the enthroned apostles are basic iconographic elements, which show that the painter of the church did not look to Chora for the models of this particular representation, but more probably to Serbia, particularly *Manasijia*. In the church in Thessaloniki, the figure of the enthroned Christ is strongly reminiscent of depictions in the ministry cycle of the Serbian monument. These iconographic observations are based on a photograph kindly made available by Nikolaos Papageorgiou, a colleague and friend preparing a monograph on *Prophitis Elias*. I take this opportunity to warmly thank him.



Fig. 11. Chora, Healing of the Multitude. Photo by C. Wales; Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Photograph and Fieldwork Archive, BF.S.1991.0387.

hand crutch. The most remarkable depiction, however—on account of its rarity, striking details, and dramatic realism—is that of the man with the large, egg-shaped hernia bulging between his legs and resting heavily on the ground. These extraordinary iconographic elements make these sick individuals some of the most compelling figures in Palaiologan art and render their representation one of the most remarkable for its individuality and grotesqueness.¹¹³

In the Chora scene, the merciful Lord, or the generous Master, as Metochites calls Christ, is shown engaging physically and emotionally with the Multitude, a feature that stands out in relation to other

portrayals of him in healing scenes.¹¹⁴ As Glenn Peers observes, in contrast to the three disciples, who upon beholding the infirm appear apprehensive and hesitant, keep their distance, Christ shows no reluctance to engage with the multitude.¹¹⁵ Here, Christ conspicuously moves away from the group of disciples and

114 The depiction of Christ in Chora—in motion, characteristically bending to get close to the sick—indeed differs from the more standardized stance attributed to him in the healings at several monuments of the period, including Bogorodica Ljeviška and Staro Nagoričino, from medieval Serbia, and the parekklesion of St. Euthymios and St. Nicolaos Orphanos, in Thessaloniki. See Panić and Babić, *Bogorodica Ljeviška*, 120, drawing 3; B. Todić, *Staro Nagoričino* (Belgrade, 1993), pls. 40–41; E. Tsigaridas, *Οι τοιχογραφίες του παρεκκλησίου του Αγίου Ευθυμίου (1302/3): Έργο του Μανουήλ Πανσέληνου στη Θεσσαλονίκη* (Thessaloniki, 2008), figs. 23, 85–86; A. Tsitouridou, *Ο ζωγραφικός διάκοσμος του Αγίου Νικολάου Ορφανού στη Θεσσαλονίκη: Συμβολή στη μελέτη της Παλαιολόγιας ζωγραφικής κατά τον πρώιμο 14ο αιώνα* (Thessaloniki, 1986), pls. 45–48.

115 Peers, “The Iconography of Healing.”

113 Peers, “The Iconography of Healing.” On the grotesque aesthetic of diseases in hagiographical narratives, see S. Constantinou, “Grotesque Bodies in Hagiographical Tales: The Monstrous and the Uncanny in Byzantine Collections of Miracle Stories,” *DOP* 64 (2010): 43–54.

leans forward to address the afflicted. He bends from the waist, his posturing overtly different from that of the upright figure of the followers behind him. He also stands squarely on the same plane as most of the afflicted, whereas the disciples stand on a green ground. This depiction of the merciful Christ does not derive from established models of healing scenes, but instead illustrates the image of Christ of the Miracles that Metochites created in his writings.

This highly unusual choice of scene reflects Metochites' influence not only on the iconography—that is, in the kind of healing—but also on the choice of the space. Metochites refers frequently to various categories of the sick, who in society are tragic cases of human life.¹¹⁶ The representation of the Healing of the Multitude, however, is connected even more closely with his literary oeuvre. In his last poems, he refers repeatedly to the misfortune of men afflicted by pain because of the multitude of their sins:

Τὰ σύ γε παύσαις,
δέσποτ' ἐλέου δὴ μοῦνε θελητὰ διὰ πάντ' αἰῶ,
ἦν δέ μ' ἁμαρτᾶδων νήριθμα πλήθε' ἐρύκη,
αὐτὸν ιδέσθ' ἐρίηρα μετὰ βιόουσιν ἐόντα
γείνεος ἡμετέριοιο δαρὸν δὴ τρυχομένοιο,
ῥάον' ἀκύμονα βιοτὰν ἀπάτερθ' ἀλεγεινῶν. . .
ἀτὰρ εἰκότα σὴ φύσει μάλ' ἄναξ σύ γ' ἐοργῶς,
ἴλαθι τῷδε γένει κεν, σφίσιν ἐπίσχεο δεινόν,
σὸν βαρύτατ' ὀλέκοντα χόλον, τόνδ' ἐνδικον
αἵψα.

O Lord Christ, if thou hast verily decreed that this state should be blotted out of thy book, to disappear forthwith completely, there is no other reason for this than the multitude of our sins; by which we, much transgressing, have moved thee to such great anger against us, contrary to thy nature. . . Propitious, be thou once again propitious toward us remembering thy nature, remembering thy miracles of old, which thou wroughtest in thy love of mankind, deeds ever glorious ineffable, unfathomable.¹¹⁷

116 See above, pp. 98–99.

117 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XVI, vv. 233–38, 241–43; translation from J. M. Featherstone, *Theodore Metochites's Poems "To Himself": Introduction, Text and Translation*, Byzantina Vindobonensia 23 (Vienna, 2000), 31.

Metochites' symbolic presence is declared by the inscription of the representation. The phrase ποικίλα πάθη (multitude of sins) stems directly from his thinking, in which the sickness of the human soul and body is identified with the notion of various sins, the ἁμαρτᾶδων νήριθμα πλήθε (countless multitude of sins), as he writes characteristically in his sixteenth poem.¹¹⁸ These passions are manifested as mental aberrations, which lead to sin, whereas the virtues of the soul lead to wisdom and salvation.¹¹⁹ Chora illustrates the basic idea of the healing and salvation of all the sick, of all ages, who suffer from common and rare diseases, such as the man with a hernia, the most extraordinary iconographic detail in the entire program.¹²⁰ The relationship between the Healing of the Multitude and the Chora patron is further enhanced by the location of the scene. The entire ministry cycle is summarized in this central idea, which demonstrates why it was chosen as one of the last scenes in the cycle and is positioned prominently in front of the entrance to the parekklesion. The ideological relationship between Christ's healings and unique and eternal healing, that is, salvation, which Christ offers through resurrection, links the narthexes with the parekklesion and clearly projects Metochites' hope that Christ's healings will lead to man's salvation, including his own.

The significance of this and other healing scenes in the south bay is further emphasized by their connection to the representation of Christ Chalkites in the Deesis panel on the eastern wall of the inner narthex (fig. 1, no. 18).¹²¹ The healing tradition of the Chalkites has been linked with the Haemorrhousa and the personal history of Maria Palaiologina, represented by the nun

118 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem XVI, v. 235; Featherstone, *Theodore Metochites's Poems*, 67.

119 "For since there is obviously a certain irrational and passion-susceptible part of our soul, from which immediately after the initial sensation pleasure and pain are excited, resembling certain fragments and pieces that inevitably follow the continuity of nature, and since it is impossible to entirely escape or ignore them, one ought necessarily to use sensation, so it seems, although one ought to use it in the best possible manner" (Xenophontos, *On Morals*, 115).

120 On the various diseases described in hagiographical sources, see A.-M. Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts," *DOP* 56 (2002): 153–73, esp. 158–59.

121 For the iconographic and healing tradition of the Chalkites, see C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), 108–42. See also Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol," 160, with bibliography.

Melania in the donor image.¹²² Apart from the relation between the Chalkites and Melania, however, it is clear that Metochites sought to link his patronal portrait in the lunette above the door (fig. 1, no. 22) in the inner narthex with the Deesis and Christ Chalkites. This relationship is obvious and direct, because the patron offers Chora to the enthroned Christ and through this offering asks for his salvation, by extension, from the neighboring representation of the Chalkites:

Καὶ σύ, με, μάκαιρά τε πάνταγέ τε βασιλεια,
μῆτερ ἐμοῖο Θεοῖο, τέμενος πάναγνον ἱρὸν
ὑψιμέδοντος ἀνακτος, ἧ τέμενος τόδ' ἔγωγε
ἀνεθέμαν φέρον ἱμερτὸν νύ τ' ἀγακλεές οἶον,
τήνδε μονάν, ἃ σέ' οὐνομα κεκλήατ' ἀρίτιμον
Χώρ' (ἀτὰρ οὕτωσί πως . . .)
χώρα τέ μοι τότε ἦδ' ἄλλακρ γένευ καταφυγῆς,
ᾧ φρα μ' ἐλεύθερον υἱέος τεοῖο δικαστοῦ
καταδίκης ἀπάνευθε ῥὰ θείης, ἴλαον αὐτὸν
ἄφθιτον υἱέ' οὐράνιον ἀναχθ' ὑπερμενέ' αὐτῇ
σῆσι λιταῖσι ποεῦσα, ἐπεὶ ῥά θ' ἔτοιμος ἐς οἶκτον
οἴκοθεν ἄρ' ἐντὶ μετὰ πάντεσσι μερόπεσσι,
κάρτ' ἐράων εὐεργεῖν, πουλυδότῃς ἐάων.

And to you, O pure mother of my God, clean temple of the all-mighty king, I offered that most clean, prestigious temple, that most desirable, illustrious monastery; I called it Chora. . . . O you, immaculate, holy and beautiful palace of the Lord protect me at the time of the Last Judgement, of which I am afraid, and save me, becoming my safeguard and place of refuge, so that I may not be condemned by your Son who will be the judge; ask the heavenly, eternal Lord, your Son, with your prayers to show mercy to me.¹²³

Metochites' facial expression visually projects the soteriological message he presents in his literary oeuvre (fig. 12). The deeply human and sensitive expression displays no hint of snobbery.¹²⁴ The figure of Metochites

himself and the two depictions of Christ (in the lunette and in the adjacent Deesis) illustrate a central idea of the patron's first and second poems, in which he seeks the healing power of Christ for himself because of his sins.¹²⁵ The patron's countenance of humility and desire for forgiveness can be explained by his personal confessions in his poems. Nancy Ševčenko rightly discerns the uniqueness of the patronal portrait as characterizing Metochites as "supplicant and donor."¹²⁶ The patron of Chora, the highest official at the emperor's side, indeed links his personality to the imperial donors of Hagia Sophia,¹²⁷ just as other senior dignitaries in the important foundations in Constantinople would have done. That said, the portrayal of his figure stands out as singular. It bears no relation to the emphatic proskynesis of the kneeling emperor in the south lunette of Hagia Sophia's narthex or to the mien and expression of Justinian and of Constantine in the south vestibule of the Great Church. Rather Metochites directs his self in the donor portrait in the same way he imprints his personality in his writings, namely, outwardly strong but inwardly fragile. He petitions for salvation through the expression on his face at the moment of offering the church to Christ. Although there is sufficient space in the large lunette for Theodore to be depicted standing, he elected to be shown kneeling, albeit with his huge headdress occupying much of the blank ground to the extent that his figure almost reaches the shoulder of Christ, whom the *ktetor* looks straight in the eye.

The patron's figure overall reflects the quite contradictory self-portrait he constructed in his poems.

125 "O Christ my Lord . . . I offered them for the expiation of my sins so that you may be merciful to me. . . . O good merciful Lord, who looks with compassion on all those whom you want to save, save me as well. . . . O my good Lord. Please accept my offerings as a sacrifice . . . being sympathetic to me when you take your seat to judge the sinners. . . . I am most anxious, considering the innumerable crimes I have committed. My mind, dwelling on all these things and contemplating your frightful last judgment, trembles with fear" (Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, vv. 1264–69, 1288–91, 1293–97; Polemis, *Poems*, 90–91). Metochites asks the monks to pray for his salvation because he is so intensely conscious of his guilt and so afraid due to the sins he has committed. See Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites," 32–33.

126 N. P. Ševčenko, "The Portrait of Theodore Metochites at Chora," in *Donations et donateurs dans le monde byzantine*, ed. J.-M. Spieser and É. Yota (Paris, 2012), 189–205, esp. 191, 196.

127 R. S. Nelson, "The Chora and the Great Church: Intervisuality in Fourteenth-Century Constantinople," *BMGS* 23 (1999): 67–101, esp. 80–81. See also Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, 45.

122 Teteriatnikov, "Nun Melania"; see also R. Schroeder, "Prayer and Penance in the South Bay of the Chora Esonarthex," *Gesta* 48.1 (2009): 40–41; Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol," 163.

123 Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, vv. 1302–7, 1311–17; Polemis, *Poems*, 91–92.

124 For a different opinion, see Mango, *The Brazen House*, 141–42.

Fig. 12.
Chora, the *ktetor*
Theodore Metochites.
Photo by author.



In the patronal mosaic, the artist authentically captures the emotion that Metochites desired to project through his face, which is far removed from the stylized abstracted or neutral expression typical of period portraits.¹²⁸ Metochites' posture and aristocratic attire reflect his public image—one of high social and economic standing, erudition, and incumbency as a senior office of state he holds, all of which he attests in his early poems—but at the same time, as he addresses the charitable Lord and begs for mercy and salvation, his facial expression imparts internal insecurity, which he frequently expressed in his writings.

128 I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), figs. 66, 71, 87, 93, 141, 143–51.

Returning to the Healing of the Multitude, research has attributed the rare scene at Chora to the existence of a hospital in the complex of the monastery and the influence of this on the mosaicist; all categories of patients depicted in the scene were treated there.¹²⁹

129 Knipp, "Narrative and Symbol," 163. Rossi, "Reconsidering," 73–76, has linked the representation of the Healing of the Multitude with Nikephoros Xanthopoulos's account of the miracles of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege. This iconographic connection is obvious in the Panaghia Hodegetria in Mystras, where the image of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege over the entrance of the narthex is perfectly attuned with the miracles. See Etzeoglou, *Ναός της Οδηγήτριας*, pls. 30–31; Rossi, "Miracle Cycle," esp. 238–40. In Chora the representation of Zoodochos Pege over the tomb of Demetrios Angelos Doukas Palaiologos, son of Emperor Andronikos II, in the arcosolium of the north wall of the inner narthex, does not seem to be associated with the miracle scenes located on the opposite edge of the inner narthex.

The theory of a hospital at the monastery, proposed by Ihor Ševčenko, was based on an indirect reference by Metochites to a place where the monks cared for and cured the sick.¹³⁰ Metochites, in his literary oeuvre and in his letter to the monks of Chora on the occasion of the death of their abbot, expresses his ideas on how to deal with illness, which are closely linked to the scenes of Christ's healing miracles:

Show compassion toward the sick and be ready to extend all possible help to them through means which, as you know, have been available in the monastery for that purpose for a long time, from the very beginning, and with which I was very much concerned. This assistance should extend both to those who are inside the monastery, live together with you, and are sharing your way of life and to outsiders, whoever they may be. Wherever possible, assist Nature, to whose laws we are all subject, in her battle against <sickness> annoying insurrection and abuse; attend to the visiting of the sick and thereby attend to Christ, who makes visiting them His own concern and applies it to Himself along with His other commands concerning love of our fellow man.¹³¹

This passage shows even more realistically Metochites' sympathetic attitude in regard to human sickness and his genuine interest in the need for bodily healing. It goes on to reveal that the patron of the monastery took measures to purchase the necessary equipment and medicines to maintain the space in the monastery that functioned as an infirmary and had existed from

earlier times. Just as Metochites purchased expensive books and furniture and decorated the monastery for the spiritual edification of the monks,¹³² he acted similarly toward the healing of their bodies from sicknesses, as first and foremost, the infirmary served the needs of the monastery.

The phrase "Show compassion toward the sick" links directly to the compassionate Christ of the Healings in the poems of the patron. Metochites urges the monks to follow his thinking, so as to relieve the afflicted, and explicitly states why Chora is a space of spiritual and corporeal salvation: Combating sickness in society with the laws of the natural world, the spiritual wisdom of human beings, and the equipment of the infirmary are the basic prerequisites for healing, as he understood it. Consequently, the iconography of the healing miracles and of salvation, in the various spaces of the monastery church, were complemented through the operation of the infirmary (even though it is not clear whether it was an established hospital, *xenon*, like the one that operated at the Pantokrator monastery).¹³³ Whatever the case for Metochites the representation of the healing cycle was not due primarily to the specific space, but to his broader thinking and his personal need for healing and salvation. As his letter to the monks and the patron's oeuvre confirm, the Chora monastery is above all a space of spiritual development, and more generally a benefaction for society, also encompassing an infirmary.

Space, Imagery, and Metochites' Thinking

The patron's extensive restoration of Chora, by adding spaces in the western, northern, and southern sections of the church, completely changed the form of the middle Byzantine katholikon, creating a structural building complex whose chief trait Robert Ousterhout called "an eloquent irregularity."¹³⁴ The intentional

The funeral function of the north part projects the eschatological character of the representation, because it is accompanied by Christ Η ΧΩΡΑ ΤΩΝ ΖΩΝΤΩΝ (The Realm of the Living), as declared in the inscription for the figure of Christ in bust, on the intrados of the arcosolium. See Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:295–99 (tomb H); S. T. Brooks, "The History and Significance of Tomb Monuments at the Chora Monastery," in *Restoring Byzantium*, 23–31, esp. 25–28; N. Troumpkou, "Ο τάφος του δεσπότη Δημητρίου στη Μονή της Χώρας και η Παναγία Ζωοδόχος Πηγή," *Βυζαντινά 3* (2016): 301–17.

130 Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites," 32, n. 105.

131 Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites," 75. For the Greek text, see Polemis and Kaltsogianni, *Oration* 16: Πρὸς τοὺς μοναχοὺς τῆς Χώρας· ἐπὶ τῇ τελευτῇ τοῦ πρώτου καθηγουμένου αὐτῶν Λουκά· μονωδία τε ἐπ' αὐτῷ· καὶ προτροπή αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν τοῦ καλοῦ (13.44–52).

132 In his first poems, Metochites states clearly the aim of buying books. See above, note 12. On Metochites' book collection in Chora, see Ševčenko, "Theodore Metochites," 34–37.

133 See T. S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire* (Baltimore, 1997), 135–66, for the way in which hospitals were organized in the monastic community, as described in detail in the typikon of John II Komnenos.

134 R. G. Ousterhout, "Reading Difficult Buildings: The Lessons of the Kariye Camii," in Klein, Ousterhout, and Pitarakis, *Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, 95–105, esp. 104–5. For Metochites' restoration

morphological multilingualism in the Chora complex is evident in the different spaces, each with its own function and significance yet unified within the entity as a whole. The extensive marble dado in the naos of the katholikon left only the upper surfaces available for decoration, which were decorated according to the basic principles of the middle Byzantine Dodecaorton.¹³⁵ The strident contrast between the narrativity of the iconographic cycles in the two narthexes and the austere middle Byzantine system to which the artist cleaves the Palaiologan mosaics in the naos are characteristic of the imbalance in the monastery's decorative style.

The two narthexes, the parekklesion, and the refectory were autonomous spaces in the monastery complex, but at the same time, because of the shared thematic and iconographic references to the healings and resurrection cycles, they formed a single and dynamic ensemble with a clear symbolic message. This organization led the faithful along a contiguous course of imagery from one end of the building to the other through alternating architectural forms. The different spaces and surfaces, although self-contained, are also unified in the eye of the beholder through the iconographic program. Their symbolic messages impart illness, healing, salvation, and resurrection. There is a strong sense in Chora that the building consists of different architectural units that on the one hand function as an autonomous space, but on the other as a broader whole. Behind this complexity and seemingly piecemeal articulation of the building ensemble lies the thinking of the learned patron.¹³⁶

Here Metochites' view is based on a specific philosophical perspective, awareness of which helps in understanding not only the organization of the spaces of the ministry cycle but the whole complex as well. This concept, called Division (*διάρεσις*) and Full Completeness (*εντελέχεια*), is a philosophical aesthetic system of

the imperial school of Nicaea. Emperor Theodore II Laskaris (1221/22–1258), a prolific and unconventional author, devoted the first of his six essays to this notion.¹³⁷ Laskaris asserts,

After the dignity of full completeness, one should know that division is closest to full completeness, but it [division] is closest to each of the two [full completeness and dignity], if something is complete in every respect. . . . For should we divide, we make a collection that seeks also full completeness beginning from division and ending at this one [full completeness] from the other [division] as if from a mother, from her as if from a breath, an animated force of life. How can, then, what is born not come from a maternal cause, [15] and how can what is permitted to endure not be composed from life-giving incorruption? Division is a mother, a full completeness of things, a life and a soul, and is, as it were, a constitutive, essential incorruption and existence. The person thus seeking full completeness seeks the integrity of his own labour. . . . What else does the person who preserves the dignity of each of the two things [full completeness and division] do other than seek blamelessness as far as it lies within human reach, strengthen his own characteristics, train his mind not to think loose thoughts, and forces their actions to act most reasonably and in full completion? . . . This is most novel, this is most true . . . since through full completeness and division things come into being, endure, and possess their natural character. Great is, therefore, the exaltation of full completeness and division! For these are sisters always, and where the one is found, the other is inseparably there too. Neither is in time the former apart from the latter, nor is in action the one unhelpful to the other, for they have in common time and power, labour and honour, and everything is to them common, akin and inseparable.¹³⁸

see Underwood, *Kariye Djami*, 1:14–24, summarized in Ousterhout, *Kariye Camii*, 89.

135 The Palaiologan painter's obligatory dependence on the twelfth-century program, also ascertained in the apse, gives the impression that the naos mosaics follow a more "conservative style." See Ousterhout, "Difficult Buildings," 99–100. Metochites refers in his first and second poem to the marble dado and to the mosaic decoration in the upper parts of the katholikon. See Polemis, *Carmina*, poem I, 990–93, 1001–5, poem II, 334–39; Polemis, *Poems*, 82–83, 103.

136 Ousterhout, "Difficult Buildings," 98–100; idem, *Finding a Place in History: The Chora Monastery and Its Patrons* (Nicosia, 2017), 35, 39–41.

137 See P. A. Agapitos, "Literature in the Empire of Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Interpretative Synthesis," *Medioevo Greco* 21 (2021): 1–37, esp. 15–37.

138 P. A. Agapitos and D. Angelov, "Six Essays by Theodore II Laskaris in Vindobonensis Phil. Gr. 321: Edition, Translation,

The young Theodore encountered division and full completeness during his studies at the imperial school of St. Tryphon, founded by Laskaris.¹³⁹ From the content of Metochites' speech in praise of Nicaea, delivered in that city in the presence of Emperor Andronikos II, one realizes that he had read the *Encomium on the Great City of Nicaea*, written some forty years earlier by Laskaris.¹⁴⁰ The influence of this philosophical system is readily apparent in Metochites' thinking and the way in which he composes his scholarly and literary works.¹⁴¹

The philosophical concept of division and full completeness, as explicated in Laskaris' essay, helps in interpreting the thinking of Chora's patron that lies behind the healings cycle in the different parts of the monastery complex and on the architectural surfaces on which the cycle is developed. The cycle is preserved in the bays, spanning two narthexes, the ceilings of which are articulated with domical vaults, some of which are in a style that is found only at Chora.¹⁴² Each bay as a structural unit divides the larger space of the two narthexes, isolating one part of the unified architectural

space and at the same time enhancing the continuity and unity of the space of which it is a part.

The structural function of the architectural surfaces, at once separate and incorporated in a set, requires explanation. The organization of the healing cycle in the narthexes functions in exactly the same way. This represents the ideal solution for depicting an extensive cycle as a divided entity—the dominant idea in the philosophical conception of division and full completeness. The narration of the healings was adapted perfectly to the narthexes following the same logic. Each episode of healing in each of the bays constitutes a self-contained and distinct thematic unit, but at the same time is part of a larger iconographic entity. One gets this impression when looking at the ministry cycle from the northern and southern ends of the outer narthex (figs. 13–14), which reinforces the view about the interaction between artist and architect.¹⁴³ Moreover, the healings in the south bay of the inner narthex function as an autonomous program, but are also part of the ministry cycle.

The other important space for the healings cycle, after the narthexes, was the monastery's large refectory, which, as Metochites wrote in his second poem, stood next to the katholikon.¹⁴⁴ The poem mentions that scenes of miracles were depicted in the refectory, without providing additional details.¹⁴⁵ There is very little evidence of healing scenes in the few refectories surviving from the Byzantine period, unlike from the post-Byzantine period, of which there are examples of decorated refectories.¹⁴⁶ From Metochites' testimony,

Analysis," *JÖB* 68 (2019): 39–76, esp. 40–41, and for comments on this passage, 67.

139 For Metochites' studies at the imperial school, see Agapitos, "Literature and Education," 38–40, with full bibliography.

140 E. Mineva, "Ο 'Νικαεὺς' τοῦ Θεοδώρου τοῦ Μετοχίτου," *Diptycha* 6 (1994–1995): 307–27, specifically 314–25; A. Tartaglia, *Theodoros II Dukas Laskaris: Opuscula rhetorica* (Munich, 2000), 68–84; Agapitos, "Literature," 36 with bibliography.

141 The full extent of the influence of division and full completeness in Metochites' writings has yet to be investigated systematically. In regard to the present study, its influence can be ascertained in the first chapter of the first book of *Introduction to Astronomy* and in his first poem, which reference the life and education of Metochites and his relation to the Chora monastery. See B. Bydén, *Theodore Metochites's Stoicheiosi Astronomike and the Study of Natural Philosophy and Mathematics in Early Palaiologan Byzantium*, *Studia Graeca et latina Gothoburgensia* 66 (Göteborg, 2003), 417–43. Another example of this influence is the seven-volume luxury edition that Metochites prepared with the collaboration of his pupil Nikephoros Gregoras (ca. 1295–1360). The edition is a compilation of autonomous works (poems, epistemological works) with different content, but all the pieces constitute one manuscript, standing as a single complete corpus. See Agapitos, "Literature and Education," 39–40. On Gregoras' comments on these works of Metochites, see *Nicephori Gregorae Epistulae*, ed. P.-A. M. Leone, 2 vols. (Matino, 1982), 2:85–88. I thank Panagiotis Agapitos for this reference.

142 R. G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, DOS 25 (Washington, DC, 1987), 131.

143 Ousterhout, *The Architecture*, 130–31, figs. 115–116; idem, *Kariye Camii*, 35, 39.

144 "Nearby (main church) is built the common refectory, a beautiful, sacred building very long indeed" (Polemios, *Carmina*, poem II, 334–35; Polemios, *Poems*, 103). See also Featherstone, "Metochites's Poems," 220; Magdalino, "Theodore Metochites," 173.

145 "It (the refectory) is decorated with paintings: it is shining with an excellent colouring resembling various, colourful flowers and the paintings represent the mysteries and the miracles of Christ" (Polemios, *Carmina*, poem II, 337–41; Polemios, *Poems*, 103).

146 No scenes of healing have survived from the wall paintings of the second layer in the refectory of the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, while only the scene of Christ Healing the Man Possessed has been identified with certainty in the refectory of Apollonia (last quarter of the thirteenth century). By contrast, several scenes of miracles are found in the refectories of the Athonite Dionysiou, Esphigmenou, and Pantokratoras monasteries. See H. Kollias, *Βυζαντινή Τέχνη στην Ελλάδα: Πάτμος* (Athens, 1986),

Fig. 13.
Chora, outer
narthex, looking
north. Photo
by author.



Fig. 14.
Chora, inner
narthex, looking
south. Photo by
R. Ousterhout.



it is quite probable that some of the subjects of healings depicted in the two narthexes were repeated in the Chora refectory. After all, the influence of division and full completeness on Metochites' thinking led the patron of the composite complex of Chora to the idea of unifying the aforesaid independent spaces through the shared experience of the iconography of Christ's miracles. The full integration of this unified scheme was achieved by the addition of the parekklesion to the katholikon. The parekklesion completes, as space and iconography, the ideological scheme of healing-salvation, as emphasized in the patron's poems. The resurrection scenes and the Descent into Hades complete the eschatological dimension that Metochites gives to the healings and illustrate his hope of eternal life at the Last Judgment, the expressed sentiment with which he often concludes his poems.¹⁴⁷

The same continuity and connectivity of Metochites' philosophical views and his personal desires is also apparent in the internal articulation of the monastery. It cannot be a coincidence that the healing cycle is brought to a close at the southern end of the inner narthex, where a passageway leads to the parekklesion (fig. 14). Metochites, in his personal desire for redemption, unites the healings in the narthex with his funerary chapel, where his path toward salvation ends with resurrection. The patron often expressed in his writings the division between his professional life in state affairs and his desired ideal life of acquiring knowledge. These fundamental views in Metochites' oeuvre are reflected in the layout of the two narthexes and the parekklesion and imprinted the correlation of these spaces with the iconography.¹⁴⁸

24–26; J. J. Yiannias, "The Refectory Program at Apollonia," in *The Twilight of Byzantium*, ed. S. Ćurčić and D. Mouriki (Princeton, 1991), 162–63, fig. 3; A. I. Tavlakis, "Το εικονογραφικό πρόγραμμα στις τράπεζες των μονών του Αγίου Όρους" (PhD diss., University of Ioannina, 1997), 103–6, 145–46, 202–3. See also J. J. Yiannias, "The Refectory Paintings of Mount Athos: An Interpretation," in *The Byzantine Tradition after the Fall of Constantinople*, ed. J. J. Yiannias (Charlottesville, 1991), 269–340.

147 See S. E. J. Gerstel, "The Chora Parekklesion, the Hope for a Peaceful Afterlife, and Monastic Devotional Practices," in Klein, Ousterhout, and Pitarakis, *Kariye Camii Reconsidered*, 129–45, at 136–38.

148 For the linking of these spaces and their contribution to imparting the iconographic messages, see R. Ousterhout, "Temporal Structuring in the Chora Parekklesion," *Gesta* 34.1 (1995): 63–76, esp. 68–70; idem, "Difficult Buildings," 100.

Conclusion

The most essential observation to be drawn from the interpretation of the Chora ministry cycle through the literary oeuvre of the foundation's patron is the autobiographical character of the cycle.¹⁴⁹ In reality, the greater part of the cycle's course parallels the life and worldview of Metochites as expressed in his works as a whole. The hymn to knowledge and wisdom, with the representation of Jesus among the Doctors, and the attainment of spiritual strength in order to deal with the dark and satanic forces of human life, as imprinted in the scene of the Temptations, constitute the patron's personal wish for protection and an answer to the anxiety he repeatedly voices. In these two iconographic representations, Metochites sees his own path toward acquiring the knowledge that not only secured for him the highest public offices, but also led him to renovate the monastery that offered him safety from the hostile elements of society, which he correlates with the action of demonic forces. Concurrently, these two scenes link to the patron's continuous declarations concerning the spiritual armament required for man to attain the ideal life and to confront demonic forces.

A prominent leitmotif in Metochites' thinking is illness, because he believes that it results from the sick society in which he lives, not least because of the prevailing atmosphere in the Byzantine capital due to the civil strife between Andronikos II and his grandson. The civil war is, however, only one aspect of a sick society that is suffering more generally due to spiritual decadence and materialism, which generate diseases of mind and body. This decadence generates envy, which destroys the mind, body, and human relations. The intensity of the personal relationship between Chora's iconography and its patron emanates from Metochites' confession that he too, as a prominent member of society, is himself sick, because he has committed countless crimes in connection with his high office and involvement in state affairs.

Metochites' focus on illness and healing, as evident in his writings and in the mosaics, projects his personal anxiety over the contradictions in his life, between the

149 As demonstrated, this autobiographic character is strongly evident in many of Metochites' works and reflects the influence of Nicaean writings. See Agapitos, "Education," 37.

ideal of knowledge and the darkening of the intellect, the spiritual rise and the mental fall, the social power and the personal fear. On the one hand, Christ as healer and savior is so strong in Metochites' oeuvre that it reveals the interpretation of the ministry cycle as a unique case of a personal relationship of the patron with the program he plans. On the other hand, the notion of a suffering Christ is completely alien to Metochites' thinking, which is why any hint of the Passion is absent from the Chora narthexes, though scenes from Christ's Passion were painted in the narthex before the fourteenth century.¹⁵⁰ In the mindset of the Chora patron, man is the sufferer, and Christ is the savior.

It could be argued that Metochites' preoccupation with healing stemmed from his own affliction with a disability or disease, but from what is currently known, this was not the case. On the basis of his literary oeuvre, however, it can be confidently said that Metochites overridingly suffered illness as a psychosomatic problem. This is especially evident in his poetry,


150 Scenes from the Passion cycle are depicted in the narthex of the Zoodochos Pege in Samari, Messenia. See C. von Scheven-Christians, "Die Kirche der Zōodochos Pēgē bei Samari in Messenien" (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 1980), 161–69. The wall paintings in the narthex have recently been conserved and dated to the mid-thirteenth century. See S. E. J. Gerstel and M. Kappas, "Between East and West: Locating Monumental Painting from the Peloponnese," in *Cross-Cultural Interaction between Byzantium and the West, 1204–1669: Whose Mediterranean Is It Anyway? Papers from the Forty-Eighth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Milton Keynes (28–30 March 2015)*, ed. A. Lymberopoulou (London, 2018), 175–202, at 189–91; M. Kappas, "Ορθόδοξα μοναστήρια στη Μεσσηνία κατά τη διάρκεια της Φραγκοκρατίας," in *Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στην Πελοπόννησο 2 (ΑΕΠΕΛ 2): Πρακτικά της Β' Επιστημονικής Συνάντησης (Καλαμάτα, 1–4 Νοεμβρίου 2017)*, ed. M. Xanthopoulou et al. (Kalamata, 2020), 691–700, at 693–94, figs. 5–6.

some of which could be characterized as existentialist.¹⁵¹ The eschatological nature of salvation is expressed by the funerary chapel, which is linked in iconography and architecturally with the healings of the inner narthex. The triumphant Christ is the guarantor of Metochites' healing from painful malaise and of his own resurrection.

The messages of illness, healing, and salvation bind the iconographic program in the Chora complex, featuring the triumphant Christ protagonist in the healings cycle in the narthexes and in the resurrection cycle in the parekklesion. The poems of Metochites and the iconography of the ministry cycle express and visualize the same conception: for Chora's patron, the monastery is a spiritual space of healing in which man, through exercising his intellect, is led to healing of the body and the soul and ultimately to salvation. The rhythmical perception and comprehension of this message through the space and iconography in separate parts of the complex, which are unified by the cohesion of the program, is due to the concept of division and full completeness, according to which Metochites made the composite building of Chora his personal "keep" and the visual expression of his life: a place of refuge from woes and sin, and the place for a prestigious life of knowledge and eloquence.

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151 The method and the style that Metochites employs to develop his personal views and existential questions is strongly reminiscent of Gregory of Nazianzus, whose poetry is likewise considered existential. On this issue, see B. Vertoudakis, *Το όγδοο βιβλίο της Παλατινής Ανθολογίας: Μια μελέτη των επιγραμμάτων του Γρηγορίου Ναζιανζηνού* (Athens, 2011).

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